

[IMAGE]

## The Unhealthy Holidays: 5 Worst Things You Can Do

By Editorial Staff

Another year winding down means another string of holidays to test our health will. The last two months of the year bring seemingly endless trips to visit relatives, malls and other hectic locales far from the comfort of your regular exercise and fitness routine. That's danger with a capital D when it comes to staying on track. Let's count down the top five unhealthy holiday behaviors that can undo your hard work from the previous 10 months:

5. *Not sticking to a schedule*: Look, no one said it was easy to eat right, exercise, get enough sleep and do all the other things it takes to stay fit and healthy. Those challenges are compounded during the holiday months, when get-togethers, gift shopping and other responsibilities seem to pile up one upon the other. Who has time to stay healthy? *You do*, of course, and you need to do it the way you've done it all year: by sticking to a schedule. Calendar your exercise days and keep an eye on what you're eating to ensure you stay on track. This is no time to "wing it" – after all, how well did that work last year and the year before that?

4. *Telling yourself you've earned it*: We all deserve a "treat" now and then, whether it's a cupcake at a birthday party or a day off from the gym. We also need to continually remind ourselves of how hard we're working and why we're doing it. Staying in shape takes effort, and you deserve to feel great about that effort. But taking the last two months of the year "off" because you think you've "earned it" is the perfect recipe for health disaster. Before you know it, bad habits will have replaced good ones and you'll be back at the starting gate, wondering where you went wrong. (See No. 1 unhealthy behavior below.)

unhealthy holidays - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark 3. *Falling prey to "the blues"*: As we've discussed before, the final few months of the year (and the first few months of the next year) can increase your risk of depression. It's called seasonal affective disorder, characterized by depressive symptoms and mood changes associated with a particular time of year. Shorter days, longer nights, less sunlight and colder weather can be a bad combination for some people. One solution is to make sure you get outside for 10-15 minutes a day when the sun is shining. Take a few walks during the workday to ensure you spend a little time in the sun (which boosts your vitamin D levels, by the way), rather than spending all day inside and

leaving for home at dusk. You'll feel better and your body will thank you for it.

2. *Doing the "same old, same old"*: You may think your exercise and diet plan has been working all year, but at some point, you need to mix things up. Why? Because the brain and body get used to the "same old, same old" over time, leading to a diminished sense of achievement, boredom and stagnation. It's the "Who wants to do these same exercises *again*?" or "Who wants to eat these same foods *again*?" mentality, and it can cause you to jump off the wagon. The solution? Stay strong by incorporating new exercises into your workout regimen and trying different (healthy) foods. Variety is the spice of life, and in this case, it can carry you through the holidays committed to your health and wellness goals.

1. *Looking ahead*: Yes, next year is right around the corner, particularly when you consider how hectic the next several months generally are. That's no reason to make "getting in shape again" your New Year's Resolution in early November. Think about how great these first 10 months of the year have been in terms of the results you've seen and how you've felt. Now try to imagine having to go right back where you were on Jan. 1 of this year. Not a pretty picture, huh? Replace that picture with a portrait of confidence, determination and health by deciding *now* to finish the year strong. Your New Year's resolution won't be to "start again"; it will be to *continue* the great things you've done and become an even better, healthier person.

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