5 Tips To Eliminate Holiday Weight Gain

Mon, 11/22 10:26AM 34:34

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

holiday, holiday weight gain, protein, exercise, study, people, homeostatic, daily, grams, weight gain, sodium, variability, weight, intervention, clients, eat, data, scale, add, diet

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Welcome back to the flex diet podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Mike T. Nelson, where we discuss all ways to increase your performance, add lean body mass, improve body composition, all done in a flexible manner without destroying your health in the process. And today, we're going to talk about five steps to reduce or potentially eliminate weight gain and during the holidays. Now, for some of you who are listening or a little bit more advanced, or even trainers or coaches, this may not be revolutionary to you. But I think there might be a couple of things you can pull out of here that might be new. And this also serves as a great way when you get this question over the holidays. Hopefully, you'll think of this wonderful podcast and forwarded on to your friends and colleagues also. So this will serve also as a resource for you to send people. I'll also have all the references on there too. As always, this podcast is brought to you by the flex diet certification, which will open again in January 2020 to eight different interventions for you to get a better nutrition and body composition and recovery for yourself or for your clients. Everything from dietary protein to carbohydrates, fats, neat, asleep, and a whole lot more. So for more information, go to flex diet.com FL exdt.com, there'll be a way you can get on to the waitlist, and you will be the very first to be notified again, once it opens. We now have CPUs for NSCA, NASM, ace, and possibly CrossFit. I'm still waiting to hear back from them. But they're checking into it. As we're doing this recording. So go to flex diet calm, and we will see you there. So hopping right into it here. The weight gain during the holidays. I talked briefly about this iron radio this past week also. And this is a very common question. And one of the first things I did is dug into the research to see is this a real thing? Or is it just something people talk about all the time, but not really a real thing. And as it turns out, as you would expect, it is a real thing. There's a couple of studies that I have here. One of them is the effect of holiday season on weight gain a narrative review. This is from the Journal of Obesity 2017. And if you want kind of a one stop shop narrative reviews do a good job of that. Again, this is not a systematic review. It's not a meta analyses. But if you want just a nice overview of what's kind of going on with the data, I find narrative reviews are a really good starting point. And then you can jump into each one of those specific studies if you want to get all super nerdy with it. But in this one in a study of adults, they did find a significant weight gain was consistently observed during this period of time period of time they looked at was the last week of November, to the first or second week of January. And during this period of time, the weight gain ranged from point four 2.9 kilograms. So if you're not so good with the metric system, so point nine is close enough, let's

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say one kilogram, that's about 2.2 pounds. So at first blush, you might think, Huh, that's a lot less than I would have expected it to be. But that is a permanent change from their baseline that's over that period of time. And it's not looking at any one particular day. So when you consider the creeping obesity, slow

increases, and fat mass accumulate, vary a couple pounds a year in kind of the general population. But even if you're gaining, let's say three pounds a year, over 10 years, that's another 30 pounds. And unfortunately, the general population that is probably not much muscle. Some of it might be but without exercise, probably not a lot of its muscle again, and that's even debatable. If you look at some work from Levine that did an acute overfeeding study, they did show some addition of lean body mass in that study and again, those people were not necessarily exercising. Keep in mind that lean body mass is everything except for fat. So if you add more glycogen that is technically considered lean body mass, even though it may only be a temporary change. So in this study, we do see some data that holiday weight gain is a real thing. Another good one here, this is from Nutrition Reviews 2000 of December, holiday weight gain Fact or Fiction fiction. This is from SB Roberts. And in this particular study, they looked at, on average, a waking period of six weeks from Thanksgiving through the New Year. And they concluded from a sample of 195 adults, only an increase of about point three, seven kilograms. So again, that was like, Huh, that's not too much. However, they did know a, quote, weight gain was greater among individuals who are overweight or obese, and 14%, gain greater than 2.3 kilograms, or five pounds. So for some people, this can be a very significant weight gain over just a six week period. And in the grand scheme of things, six weeks, not a big amount of time to have more of the, quote, permanent weight gain of five pounds. So it looks like it is a real thing. So what would be some tips to reduce or potentially eliminate this? Now again, you may be thinking, well, let's just not eat any holiday cakes or cookies and stay at home and be a complete recluse and not enjoy time with family, which I think that is a horrible idea. It may or may not work. That's even if that works, it's highly debatable. But the holidays are a good time to enjoy being around families to do different things to get out. And just because you're trying not to gain any weight, I don't think you have to stay at home and remove yourself from all of that. Tip number one is to eat more protein. So for people listening to this podcast, you're probably pretty good at doing that already. The next question is, well, how much more protein should I have? The very simple one that I like is from the flixotide certification. So of course I like it is the four by 40 approach,

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if you are a male or a larger mammal, for meals at 40 grams of protein is where I would have you start. If you are a smaller mammals, or some females for meals, add 30 grams. Again, there's nothing wrong with going with a higher amount, just for some people, that is quite a bit to get down and is too difficult. So we want to make it something that you can do. The reason for 40 grams, is higher likely of satiety, right, and if you eat a bunch of protein, you're much less likely to fall face first into all of the turkey stuffing, and the pumpkin pie and everything else doesn't guarantee it but much less likely. And with 40 grams, the source doesn't make a huge difference. You can even get by with some plant protein supplements or even plant proteins themselves possibly granted, the amount of food you would have to eat to get 40 grams of protein is pretty darn high. So that covers the requirements of what's called the leucine threshold effect. And that's going to be around 2.5 to 3.5 grams of Leucine per meal that's starting the muscle protein synthetic response. Think of this as the machinery that you're going to turn on if you're creating an assembly line. And you want to repair the damage that has been done to muscles to make them a little bit bigger and stronger. This is also a pretty energetically expensive process. Also, the thing that turns on this assembly line. So kind of the on switch is a dose of leucine. Leucine is an essential amino acid. When you have a 40 gram total dose of protein, much more likely you're going to get enough leucine in even if you're using different dietary sources. The other part is you need at least six grams of essential amino acids. Those are the building blocks for new muscle. So if I'm turning on the assembly line, the on switch is loosing and I'm going to assemble those raw materials. The raw materials I'm using here are essential amino acids, I need something to actually have building blocks to create it. And if you're having a 40 gram dose of protein, much more likely you're To get six grams of essential amino acids in that last thing you need is energy. Most people are going to be in an energy surplus during this time, so we don't need to worry too much about it. So big key here, more protein is going to help with the tidy, helping keep you full

longer. And it's going to help with that repair process from damaged proteins, making sure you get enough protein. So four by 40, or four meals at 30 grams of protein. And a tip for trainers, I do have clients actually look that up using a chronometer or my fitness pal. Because I do want them to have some experience with how to find how much protein is in, say, a chicken breast or steak. I want them to put in a little bit of work, or with apps and Dr. Google Now, it's pretty easy to figure out how much grams of food will translate into grams of protein. So I want them to do a little bit work on that to be invested in the process. Tip number two, relax on Thanksgiving and Christmas. Realistically, it's only two days out of that time period, or a lot of people go wrong is they throw caution to the wind for the entire six week period. And every day is a holiday. They don't really have any plan for what's going on. And as you can imagine, that doesn't usually turn out so well. Keep in mind as we teach in the flextight certification, humans eat for two reasons. You can remember the acronym H and H. These are for hedonic and homeostatic reasons. hedonic is that food tastes good. Right? We eat because we like the taste of food. And there's nothing inherently wrong with that. However, if your entire diet is only based on foods that you really enjoy, especially with our processed foods are all targeted towards that and companies spend literally bazillions of dollars trying to get you to eat more tasty food because they make more money, it's gonna be a little hard to compete with that all the time. So eating foods that taste good is a good thing. But it should not be the sole basis of your diet, which is the other one homeostatic,

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you need food in order to run your body, homeostatic, keeping the lights on, so to speak, you'll need certain nutrients or what's called micronutrients, small amounts of these macronutrients and larger amounts, fats, proteins, carbohydrates. And the key here with point number two is to eat for both reasons. Now granted, the holiday meals are probably going to be more on the hedonic side than the homeostatic side, in your meals in between, maybe more on the homeostatic side, right? Chicken breast is tasty, but maybe not the most wonderful thing you've ever had, right or other protein sources. So you're trying to find a nice compromise between food that tastes good that you can eat on a day by day basis, that is also serving your body's homeostatic needs, both macro nutrients and micro nutrients. And if you stay with that, and don't turn every single day into a holiday, that is going to take you really far in preventing the addition of extra weight around the holidays.

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Tip number three, go move, walk do some exercise. Right now I know some critics of exercise will say that, Oh, but if we look at exercise acutely in these studies, it doesn't really add up to much fat loss. And on an acute study, that is generally true. You can out exercise a poor diet, although you have to do a lot of exercise. In order for that to happen. If you're going to the gym for 20 or 30 minutes a day. It is beneficial. But for pure fat loss reasons, probably not as beneficial as what you believe. However, for long term compliance, which is where the vast majority of people fall off the wagon, exercise is extremely important. So from a long term perspective, exercise is going to be key. I remember when I think it was Librato. Someone asked him this question years ago. What's more important diet or exercise? He used the analogy that it's two wheels on a bike and both of them are super important. That would be my thought too. I get a little bit annoyed by this talk of ABS are only made in the kitchen and Yes, if you are cutting your caloric intake, that is probably the biggest thing you can do to get leaner. But it kind of gives the impression that that's the only thing you need to do. And you read some data about exercise and it's small, acute effect. And that's not super motivating to train hard, especially if exercise is a new habit for you. So again, both of them are important, both for different reasons. Obviously, exercise has a ton of health benefits to from adding more muscle mass, which we tend to lose as we get older, adding strength, which we tend to lose as we get older. And in the robotic benefits for both just heart health, and not feeling like a sea slug every

day. Because your VO two Max is like in the single digits. So all those things are more beneficial. And you can even argue that if you have more energy, you're going to move around more, you're going to burn more calories, your neat non exercise activity, thermogenesis is going to be higher. And that can be accomplished by just more movement and walking. So again, why think formal exercise extremely important, doesn't mean you need to live at the gym for an hour or two every day. Most people if they did even one to two weight training sessions a week, some aerobic training, they would be doing pretty darn good. Now granted, you can do more than that, as long as it's intelligently programmed for you. If you don't have access to anything, bodyweight works great. I'm down here in South Padre Texas as we're recording this. So I've got access to a gym, I can go outside and run on the beach, which is awesome, I tried to do that most mornings. And even we drove down. So I brought down two kettlebells and a TRX. So I can do that we're staying here, and I'll be good to go. And then I got a membership at the gym that's down here also. So I have plenty of options of things that I can do, both with equipment and without. So tip number four, do some I'm sorry, tip number three, do some movement, walking and exercise. And in terms of number of steps to walk, just try to keep up with what you did before. So ideally, if you're walking, say 8000 steps a day, just continue that amount. At minimum. A lot of times what I see in clients, especially in the past, was that the holidays would get super busy. And their steps per day, in times that they went to the gym would drop off dramatically. And a lot of people, this tends to foster the all or nothing behavior, that if they're not exercising their nutrition, a lot of times goes to heck at the same time. So stay consistent, as best you can with movement, walking, exercise, and nutrition.

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Now on to tip number four, this one might be a little bit new. But it actually is to do daily bodyweight measurements. Now I know that kind of freaks a lot of people out that they're potentially driving them to be no more neurotic about it. But in studies and other data shows that having some type of measurement is going to be a good thing. So now my personal caveat for that is if you are the kind of person that gets on a scale, and you have a very hard time for several minutes to several hours to several days, stressing and mass amounts of anxiety because you were a couple pounds over or even under the daily weight may not be the best for you. So if your daily weight is credibly messing up your state or your mood, my biased opinion, and work on that first. And don't worry as much about a daily weight. However, I do think daily weights are very useful data. And I've had to talk to many clients and give them the overly stereotypical male engineering point of view. I can say that because I'm both of them, that the scale is not mad at you, the scale doesn't really care. The data doesn't have any emotion. Wherever you are is where you're at. We as humans will always add some type of emotion to it. So the first step is to be aware that that's what you're doing, which is common because we're all human, but to make sure it does not get too crazy. So with all those caveats out of the way, here's the study from 2019. These will all be linked in the podcast below. Daily self Wayne to prevent holiday associated weight gain in adults. So what I really liked about this is they looked at daily Wayne, but they did it specifically around the holiday to try to prevent holiday associated weight gain. And this, of course was done in humans, not little fuzzy rats. Their objective here holiday weekend is reported to be point four to 1.5 kg is the numbers that they were using. objective of the study is to test the efficacy of daily self weighing, using visual graphical feedback to prevent holiday weight gain. And realistically, that's all they did. They had a total of 111 adults that randomly assigned them to the daily self Wayne plus graphical feedback group, and completed their pre holiday visit post holiday visits. And the participants in that group perform their daily weight, they use this doing Wi Fi skills or the holiday. And they were instructed to try to not gain weight above baseline. They're trying to cold just to stay right around the same. So what they concluded here was that daily self Wayne plus graphical feedback was a successful approach to prevent holiday weight gain with those who are overweight or obese, responding most favorably to this method. And what I liked about that is it's a very simple and straightforward study, they didn't really do much else, they didn't do any interventions on nutrition, they didn't do any interventions on exercise, they literally just did an intervention of get on the scale in the

morning. And we'll give you feedback via a graph on where you're at. And your goal is to not gain weight during the holidays, it turns out something that simple, at least in this study in this group of humans, was successful. I would argue that if you can work with a coach or have yourself be accountable to somebody else, that is probably a key factor here, because they're in a study, they're accountable to the people collecting the data, you know, someone's going to look at it and review it. It was not perfect, quote, unquote, there was some changes here, but nothing really significant. So it was a very cheap and ineffective way, as long as daily weight does not mess you up, I would actually recommend it.

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And daily weight is literally just that. So what I have clients do is I track this in a program called C'mon runner, and they get up in the morning, they use the bathroom, they get on the scale, and they log in into the system. And I get to look into the little dashboard and see exactly where they're at. This will also give me a graphical interpretation. And if I want to get super fancy, which I've kind of looked at this for no man going on almost 10 plus years now, I'll look at the variability in their daily weight. So we know like fine scale variability, these small, small changes in heart rate for heart rate variability, that gives us some data on the status of your autonomic nervous system, both parasympathetic and sympathetic, as you start to losing this very fine scale variability in resting heart rate, that's an indication that you're becoming more on the sympathetic or stress side. So their data does show that that can increase your risk of sudden cardiac death and other cardiac related mortality events. The same idea could be applied to a daily weight. What I see in clients who are more successful changing their weight up or down, depending upon what their goals are, is their daily weight changes a little bit day to day, maybe they were 150 5.11 55.71 49.7, etc. There's a little bit of variation from one measurement to the next. And I think that is a good thing. What I find when clients get super stuck or hit a plateau, most of the time, not all the time, that fine scale variability goes away. They're literally within like sometimes half a pound or less the same weight every day. At that point, even if their goal is to try to lose weight. I want to get the variability back first, and then worry about the direction. I may have them do a higher carbohydrate day, I may do something to paradoxically push up their body weight for a day or two or even longer. I want to restore that fine scale variability, which I think is a marker for health across different physiologic systems. Granted, I'm biased because that was my PhD Research was fine scale differences in variability across physiologic systems. But I found that it tends to be true overall. So I'll push their weight up maybe for a day or two, like taking in higher amounts of carbohydrates, which I know will be stored more as glycogen, that's gonna pull in more water, but the scale weight is going to go up. Granted, they're probably not going to add a whole lot of fat from doing that. And then we may cut them back down or change something with their exercise. And lo and behold, it appears that they start to make progress again. So there's kind of an advanced tip you can look at. There's some fancy math and variability analysis, you can run with that. For heart rate variability, a common program is something called kudos. But there's different methods of doing variability, I just tend to eyeball it and look at it and see what's going on on a graphical way. So daily bodyweight, and am, I think is a useful intervention. The great part too, is that in the study I mentioned, they didn't talk about changing, really anything else, and it was still effective. So tip number five, is increase fluid intake in the form of water and add some electrolytes. Again, you've probably heard this before, that some people are eating because they are thirsty. And I think there's probably some truth to that I

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pulled a bunch of the literature down below. It's not, I would say a super straightforward simple stories such as that. In the studies, it does get a little bit convoluted, because sometimes the interventions are using our calorically containing beverages and sweetened beverages. So it is a little hard to parse out from the literature exactly what's going on. But I also think it's a cheap intervention that's worth trying. When

I've tried it with clients over the past many years, in general, it seems to work pretty darn good. As people drink more water and have more electrolytes, they tend to feel better, their energy is much more consistent throughout the day. Now, this is especially true, if they're doing like a ketogenic type diet that has lower levels of insulin, which does cause a higher amount, especially at first of diuresis, you're just pissing out a lot more fluid, that can be helpful days, if they're doing an intermittent fasting approach. I talked about this in the flex diet cert. Those days by bumping up fluid, and electrolytes makes a huge difference. So by definition, when you're fasting, you're not consuming any things that have calories, not consuming food, therefore your sodium intake especially, and other electrolytes is probably going to be really low on that day. Most people are salting their food, or they're reading some other processed foods. And that's where they're getting a lot of their sodium intake from. So this is one of the things I got from Rob Wolf, and Luis and Tyler and the guys that the element group that I wish I would have done much sooner than what I did. But fasting, very beneficial with that. So if we look at some of the studies, the relationship between hunger and thirst, they are associated, they're probably not as tightly associated as what I would want to believe. But I still think there's an association there. And it is a cheap intervention to test out. So test out having more fluid and more sodium, and see if that reduces your hunger sensations. I'm biased because I'm an affiliate for element. So I'll put a link in here below. So I do make some money off of that. They use about 1000 milligrams of sodium. And I'll mix that in one liter container for me, and for my taste, I find that that works pretty good. I'll have one or two of those a day, unless I'm training real hard and hot environment. And that works well. So further clients bumping up sodium like seasalt, adding that to more of their foods, bumping up water appears to help. So on days that you are new, like maybe you're going to evening turkey dinner, having more fluid and salt beforehand, having more protein that can help you spontaneously reduce the amount of food that you would eat, and doesn't feel like you're being overly restrictive in the process either, which I think is a key thing. Last part, if you've ever had a craving for salty foods, I've often wondered how much of that is just the salt itself, versus a combination of the salt and the food and the fat. Probably all the above but if you've ever I had really intense salt cravings, button potato chips and felt like I just wanted to lick all the salt off them. So maybe I'm eating potato chips to try to get more salt. That is something that you can test pretty easily. And very last point in some of the data, not a lot of the data is done using a sugar free beverage with only higher amounts of sodium. I would love to see a study with that done as the main intervention. There is some other associative data around that. One of the studies here is looking at the neural control and modulation of thirst, sodium appetite, and hunger was a very interesting read another one here, hunger and thirst issues in measurement and prediction of eating and drinking. And I'll put a few more links in there too, if you want to read those. But again, it's a very cheap, inexpensive intervention to try. Anecdotally with clients, I found that it works quite well for most. And even if it only reduces, let's say hunger by 10 or 20%, I would still kind of chalk that up as a win. Most people do feel better when they're consuming more sodium, other electrolytes and fluid. So just better energy levels overall are going to be a good thing. And I do like the element i have been using it for quite some time now. Used it for about a year and a half before it was an affiliate with them.

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I kind of scoffed at it. At first I thought this is way too simple. Like there's there's no way this is gonna have a huge effect. And I found that it's actually been quite efficacious, and the flavorings of it are really good. It's not a lot of things that I would want to drink every day day in and day out. And they did a excellent job with the flavorings there also. And of course, there's just no sugar, no real calories in it at all, too. So, shameless plug for element, check out a link there hit me up if you have any questions. Alright, so there we go. So ways to prevent holiday weight gain, there's five tips for you. Number one, have more protein, consider a four by 40 or four by 30 approach. Number two, relax on the actual day of the holiday. Whatever that is for you. Odds are it's only going to be a couple days. And it's definitely not every day of the six weeks. Tip number three, move, walk exercise more, or at least the same amount that you did

before. So try to schedule it and make sure it happens as best you can. This doesn't mean you need to spend all day at the gym when you're celebrating Christmas. But you can plan it out ahead of time and get the work in tip number four, consider a daily bodyweight measurement on the scale. Seeming that you don't freak out when you get on the scale. Tip number five and more fluid form of water and electrolytes. Related to that I did a q&a A few weeks ago also on what type of water filter that I use, you can listen to that for more information there. So there you go, there's five tips. And if you want much more information, such as this in greater depth, check out the flex diet certification, it will go on sale again in January 2022. Go to flex diet.com Fl exdt.com. And from there you'll be able to get on to the waitlist will be the first to be notified. If you enjoyed this podcast, please send it to some friends if you get a question on what you can do to reduce holiday weight gain. So on this podcast over to them, I would really appreciate it. You can also hit subscribe and leave me any feedback you find appropriate. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it. I have a whole bunch of guests coming up in December and January on very different topics. Everything from Korea teen on brain health, some more on the psychological aspects of training and nutrition, recovery aspects for advance modification of stress using hot cold and other methods and a lot more. So stay tuned for that. Thank you so much. Really appreciate it. Talk to you soon.