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Certified Personal Trainer & Fitness Nutrition Specialist Mike Giliotti Reveals the Five Biggest Fitness & Diet Mistakes to Avoid Over the Holidays

Family gatherings, tree trimmings, secret Santas – it’s the most wonderful time of the year. It’s also the season of overindulgence with endless flow of eggnog, candied yams and pumpkin pies. “We all get caught up on the fun and frenzy of the holiday season,” says Mike Giliotti, New York Personal Trainer and Fitness Nutrition Specialist. “Suddenly you find that managing your weight and sticking to your exercise program easily slides down to the bottom of your priorities. With one celebration after another, we aren’t left with much downtime, which can really take a toll on our fitness. But holiday weight gain doesn’t have to be an annual ritual. ”

Hit Snooze on the Booze

Many people know that the decadent dinners, abundance of sweets and overall eating extravaganza of the holidays isn't good for the waistline but it's the increased consumption of cocktails that often end up tipping the scales.

“It's easy to overdo it during the holidays. We eat too much, drink too much and don't exercise enough,” Says Mike. “But drinking too much alcohol can do more than give you a hangover. For example, eggnog can be one of the most caloric drinks you'll drink this holiday season.” According to Mike, one cup of this dairy-based drink has about 400 calories - before the booze - and once a healthy dose of rum is added in it can be almost 500 calories for a single drink. Have two glasses and you're up to 1,000 calories, a large portion of the entire daily-recommended caloric intake. Alcohol often leads to weight gain because it packs a lot of calories without making you feel full, and at the same time stimulates appetite and loss of inhibitions that can lead to reckless eating.

If you want to join in the holiday festivities but abstain from alcohol, there are plenty of recipes for non-alcoholic holiday cocktails.

Make Your New Year’s Fitness Resolution Before January

Vowing to workout more is definitely one of the more popular New Year’s resolutions. As a result, gym memberships increase about 30% this time of year. Avoid January crowds and sign-up fees by staying ahead of the game and sign up for a membership before the end of the year. “You can usually avoid steep initiation fees and get the best deals if you sign up at the end of the month, when the gym is trying to reach their goal,” advises Mike.

All Cardio, No Strength Training

With such little free time between the holiday shopping and parties, finding the time to squeeze in a workout can be difficult. You may think your only option is to spend your spare minutes on the treadmill or elliptical, burning as many calories as possible. Although this is a great way to get your heart rate up and burn off that second helping of pumpkin pie, sticking only to cardio isn't the best idea. "If you want to make the most of your time, strength training is really the way to go," says Mike. "There are exercises you can do virtually anywhere and, unlike going crazy on the treadmill which definitely calls for a shower afterwards, you can get by with a light towel-off before moving on with your day. Very time efficient." Once you have built up your strength those short little spurts of cardio will be even more effective, and you will have more energy throughout the day.

Holiday Pre-Gaming

According to Mike, this is one of the biggest holiday no-nos. "Going to a party hungry is one of the biggest mistakes you can make!" he warns. Holiday parties are especially bad, as they are known for having seemingly unlimited appetizers and sweets. "Pre-made appetizers are filled with processed ingredients and very high in sodium, eat too many and you will definitely feel it. Instead of tasting every dish that circulates, try to eat something light before the party and prepare by drinking a lot of water." Drinking water will not only make you feel fuller, but will also prepare you for the large amounts of sodium and sugar you will have eaten by the end of the night.

Getting Too Little Sleep

The best gift you could give yourself this holiday season is a full night's sleep every night. When you are running around all day, it can be so easy to forget how tired your body is. Adrenaline is very powerful, and although you may feel like a superhero getting by on just a few hours a night the damage you are doing to your body is considerable. "When you don't allow your body to rest and regenerate overnight, you will have to work extra hard during the day to stay focused. Headaches will be more frequent and you could even weaken your immune system, causing you to get sick," says Mike.