

Healthy Eating after the Holidays

Rosanne's parents and her brother and his family came to Colorado Springs this year to spend the holidays with Rosanne and her husband and three children. Rosanne had guests at her house for 10 days of the holiday season. She hadn't seen her family for some time, so she was very happy to be hostess to her out-of-town family, and put her best effort forth to make a beautiful holiday for everyone concerned. What she underestimated, however, was the amount of extra work the holidays would be this year. It really began around Thanksgiving time, when she prepared to host a group of 13 from her husband's office for Thanksgiving dinner. And it just continued on as she prepared for her Christmas guests. Between all the shopping, cooking, cleaning, entertaining, and attending other holiday parties, Rosanne spent most of the holidays in a blur.

Does this sound like anyone you know? Rosanne's story is a common one I hear in my office. The extra workload, however enjoyable, often makes a significant interruption in our daily life routines. Not surprisingly, health-promoting lifestyle habits that we work so hard to maintain throughout the year, often go by the wayside. We're surrounded with holiday "goodies" such as cookies, cakes, and candies. Time for exercise often gets diverted to wrapping gifts or attending holiday gatherings. So let's get back on track now that the New Year has arrived! Begin with rebuilding some of the foundations of nutritional wellbeing: a more reasonable pace to life, adequate hydration, reduction of the sweets, and renewed exercise.

Start with a deep breath. Deep breathing into the diaphragm begins to relax your central nervous system. Digestion and absorption of food is controlled by a part of the nervous system called the parasympathetic nervous system. And the parasympathetic nervous system works best when you're in a relaxed state of mood. What that means in simple terms is that optimal digestion does *not* take place when we're rushed or in a hectic state. Try slowing down the mealtime process. Set the table, light some candles, put on some pleasant dinner music, sit down, and take a few deep breaths. Not only will digestion be improved, but you'll also give your stomach a chance to catch up with your brain. Typically the stomach takes about 20 minutes to understand the message from your brain: "you've had enough, stop eating."

Drinking adequate purified water is perhaps the simplest, most economical, and most under-rated medicine available today. In this case, adequate hydration will be one of your most effective tools for overcoming the effects of the holidays. Adequate water consumption reduces appetite, cleanses away the toxins produced through over-indulgence, and enhances your immune function, just for starters. You'll have fewer headaches, fewer colds and flu's, and more energy if you keep yourself hydrated properly. To determine your own personal hydration level, try this formula. Divide your weight in half and drink that many ounces of water per day. For example, if you weight 160 pounds, drink 80 ounces of water (about 2 ½ quarts or 10 eight-ounce glasses) each day.

Sweets are carbohydrates. While some carbohydrates such as green vegetables, legumes such as lentils or other dried beans, and apples or melons are quite good for your diet, other forms of carbohydrates such as the holiday cookies and candies are not so helpful for your diet. Recent research has categorized carbohydrates according to the *Glycemic Index*. The glycemic index gives you details of which carbohydrates are better choices than others. "*The Low Carbohydrate Companion*"* by authors Donovan and Dell, is a new cookbook and guide to the glycemic index that gives you recipes, menus, and shopping lists to help you accomplish a change in your choice of carbohydrates. In the meantime, begin by limiting your intake of sweets or simple carbohydrates to just what you would eat at one meal or within the time frame of one sixty-minute period of the day. The rest of the day, stick with the healthier

carbohydrates such as green salads, stir fried veggies, or bean burritos. This means that if you know you'd like to have a piece of pie with supper, avoid cookies at lunch and donuts at breakfast.

And don't forget exercise. The human body simply was not designed to be sedentary and so does not function optimally without movement each day. Digestion and appetite are especially impacted by your level of exercise. If exercise was one of the things that went by the wayside during the holidays, begin with a daily commitment that you're sure you can keep. Even five minutes of walking per day is a good place to start. Just try the commitment to *daily* walking and see how soon it is before you're back to your pre-holiday levels of exercise. One form of exercise that I especially like is called *rebounding*. To rebound, you need a mini-trampoline (available at most department stores for \$25-\$40). Bouncing on the mini-trampoline is an indoor activity and so, does not require nice weather. And again, even five minutes per day will bring about significant health improvements.

Slowing down, drinking water, choosing better carbohydrates, and exercising are some wonderful foundations that will help get you back on track for a healthy and happy new year.