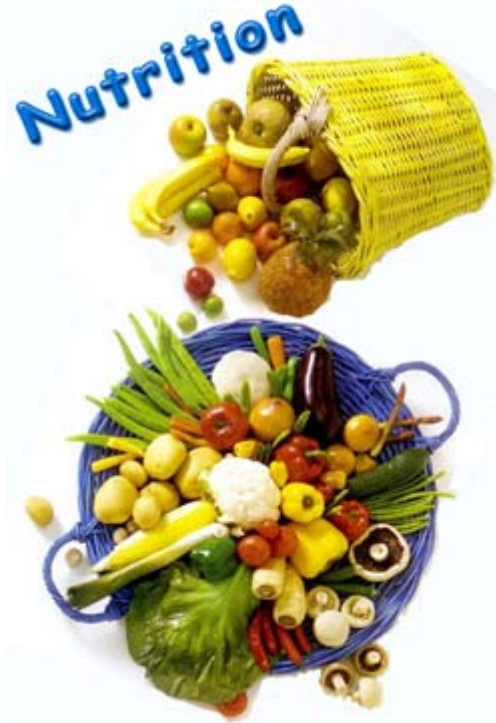


Avoid the Holimonth Spread

Jennifer Hutchison has some tips on how to avoid holiday indulgences this season



It's hard to believe the year is almost over. The next month and a half brings a much-anticipated hiatus from formal training for many triathletes. The traditional off-season for triathlon conveniently coincides with the holimonths a term used to describe the diet busting days from mid-October thru the New Year. During this time (in the northern hemisphere anyway), the decline in physical training during the off-season, combined with the bone chilling cold and early sunset can result in less energy expenditure. Add to that the stresses of holiday preparations, travel and making up for lost time with those we may have neglected while preparing for Ironman can lead the most motivated athlete to pull out the excuse cards.

Although your body needs a physical and mental break from the rigors of Ironman preparation, if you continue to eat the way you did in the weeks leading up to your race and/or you are not careful with holiday indulgences, you may have a little more pudge, which you'll have to work hard to budge, come January 1st.

Some suggestions to keep your weight in check during the holimonths include:

Stay active.

This may sound very silly to an Ironman athlete, but the simple truth is that some of us will take full advantage of the off-season reduction in activity especially if we don't have a formal off-season training plan. If you don't have a "plan", your goal should be to maintain the frequency of one or more of the triathlon disciplines by swimming, biking or running. Workout intensities should be aerobic in nature with at least one longer workout per discipline, per week. If time is limited, focus on your weakest discipline. Another common-sense suggestion is to make a conscious effort to increase your daily activity levels ... park further away from the store, take stairs whenever you can or help your spouse or partner with holiday cleaning. Anything that can get you up off your behind will help keep the weight from being deposited there!

Check your weight regularly.

A well deserved break from the intensity of Ironman training is justifiable and a small amount of weight gain should be expected (and even desired following your last big race), but you still need to stay aware to avoid piling on the pounds (or kgs for our euro readers). Weigh yourself at least once a week, at the same time of day, to keep yourself honest and tip you off if "calories in" are exceeding "calories out". If your weight goes up, or your pants are bursting at the seams, it could mean you've eaten a few too many high-calorie treats or indulged in calorie packed beverages and it's time to get back on track with reasonable food choices and portions.

Have a plan for the holiday gatherings.

Whether you are attending or hosting a work, family or social function, you can have a good time without excess.

- Be selective. Just because your friends and family think you are a super human high calorie burning endurance machine, gatherings shouldn't be an acceptable excuse to over-indulge or have your arm twisted to eat things you normally would not. Ask yourself: "Is this how I eat any other time of the year?" Remember, that plate full of turkey, gravy and stuffing doesn't need to last you until the next holiday. Most grocery stores carry this food year round.
- Unless your invitation is to a holiday sit down dinner, you'll be better off if you eat a healthful meal or snack before you leave home to help curb your appetite. Fresh fruit with cottage cheese, vegetable salads with a little lean protein or even a bowl of shredded wheat can help satisfy the tummy and reduce mindless eating.
- Skip the liquid calories. There is no better way to gain weight this holiday season than to let your guard down regarding holiday drinks. Go for good ole calorie free water, unsweetened tea or ice water with a splash of juice. If you do opt for some of lively libations, just know 8 oz egg nog packs a 350 calorie punch (better go run 3-4 miles), juice and soda packs 120+ calories and alcoholic beverages start as low as 90 calories for a 12 oz light beer and exceed 175 calories for a 3 oz martini!
- Be the holiday hero. Set a good example to friends and family by bringing or serving tasty holiday fare without all the calories, fat, sugar and guilt. Holidays should be about

the company you keep, not the feast you eat. This is a good chance to showcase some of the healthful you made during your Ironman preparation. So what if you want to make the classic high fat family fare, at least work to make the recipe “leaner” by substitute one or more high fat ingredients with lower fat alternatives.

- Be portion savvy. Think smaller portions and more selections to satisfy your flavor cravings. Spread the love around the taste buds with tiny tastes as opposed to around the waist with multiple mouthfuls.

Keep yourself honest.....Write down your food intake.

The most powerful tool you can use to help modify your eating behavior is to document your food intake. It makes you accountable to yourself and gives you a chance to see what you have done and offers the ability to bring balance to your dining selections in the meals that follow.

Off-season weight gain is a side effect of calorie consumption ignorance, combined with the natural decline in physical activity due to less training and daily activities that seem to occur during the colder months. You don’t have to fall victim to the holimonth spread, keep moving and stay committed to healthy fun and festive foods to avoid a “Plumpy New Year!”

Here’s to a safe, healthy (and hopefully lean) holi-month season!

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