Six Tips for Holiday Fitness

The holiday season is one of the busiest times of the year. Between traveling, holiday gatherings, shopping and other festivities, it can be difficult to stay active during this period. According to a National Institutes of Health report, Americans gain about one pound over the winter holidays. Here are some tips to help you stay active and fit:

1. **Set realistic goals.** Acknowledge the fact that the holidays will probably affect your exercise program to some extent. Then you can make adjustments to your workout schedule that will help you stay fit during the season.

2. **Get the family involved.** Before or after the holiday meal, if it’s not too cold outside, get everyone out for a walk around the neighborhood. If there’s snow on the ground, build a snowman together.

3. **Focus on home workout routines.** Do body weight exercises such as jumping jacks, wall sits, pushups, abdominal crunches, step-ups, squats, triceps dips on chair, planks, running in place, lunges, side planks, and supine bridges. Try “The Scientific 7-Minute Workout” published in the *New York Times*.

4. **Try winter sports.** Downhill skiing, ice-skating, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and snowboarding can be fun and a great workout. Even sledding and snowball fights will keep your heart rate up!

5. **Participate in family-friendly, holiday-themed running or walking events.** It’s time to grab your jingle bells, elf hats and Santa beards, and get running, walking or biking!

6. **Incorporate high-intensity interval training.** Tabata training is an example of high-intensity training. The Tabata workout lasts 4 minutes for each exercise. Push yourself as hard as you can for 20 seconds and rest for 10 seconds until you complete 8 sets. Here is an example of a 20-minute Tabata workout: do jumping jacks for 20 seconds, then rest for 10 seconds and repeat for a total of 8 sets. Take a 1-minute break, and then repeat with the following exercises in the same fashion: pushups, squats and bent over rows.

Have a happy and active holiday season!

Resources: NIH, Ace fitness, Women’s health
The Omega Fatty Acids: What are They?

Q: What are omega-3 fatty acids?

A: Omega-3 fatty acids are classified as polyunsaturated, which means they are long chains of carbon molecules that contain multiple double bonds. These fats play an important role in cell membranes, vision, the brain and yes, even sperm. They also convert into messenger molecules called eicosanoids that direct the activities of cells. The eicosanoids derived from omega-3 fatty acids tend to be anti-inflammatory, relaxing the immune system and decreasing blood pressure. Omega-3 fatty acids have enormous benefits for cardiovascular health, are essential to maintaining a healthy pregnancy and have been shown to be beneficial in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, ulcerative colitis, depression and a host of other health conditions.

Q: What are the best sources of omega-3 fats?

A: Fatty fish, which contain EPA and DHA, are the best sources of omega-3 fats. These include salmon, mackerel, sardines, tuna and bluefish. Of these, salmon and sardines tend to be the lowest in mercury. Wild-caught fish are lower in contaminants and higher in omega-3 content. Grass-fed meat and dairy, as well as free-range eggs, are also good sources of omega-3. Vegetarians can look to ground flax and chia seeds, walnuts, and green leafy vegetables. These have the benefit of being lower in contaminants such as mercury and PCB’s.

Q: What are ALA, EPA and DHA?

A: Alpha-linolenic acid, or ALA, is the plant form of omega-3 and is produced in the chloroplasts of green plants including grass. This is why grass-fed meat is a significant source of omega-3. EPA and DHA are the slightly longer-chain fatty acids found in fish and grass-fed animals. They are the active form in the human body. Although we are able to convert ALA to EPA and DHA, this process is inefficient in humans, so the best sources are the fatty fish.

Q: What is the difference between omega-3 and omega-6?

A: Omega-6 fatty acids are also polyunsaturated fats and like omega-3’s, play an integral role in the structure of the body, including acting as a component of cell membranes. Most Americans have an excessively high ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids, due to the use of vegetable oils in many processed foods. The concern is that omega-6 fatty acids are also precursors to eicosanoids, but these eicosanoids tend to promote more inflammation. Omega-6 fats provide some benefits, including lowering LDL (‘bad’) cholesterol. A healthy diet includes such whole food omega-6 sources as avocados, nuts and seeds, but minimizes vegetable oils in processed foods, especially soybean, corn, cottonseed and sunflower oils.

References