

Health experts say holiday battle of the bulge can be won

The holiday season is upon us, and with it all the wonderful, rich food and drink temptations that threaten to steer us off our intended course of diet or at least moderation.

So, how to steer a safe course while still enjoying those holiday meals and parties? How to win the battle of the bulge?

“It really comes down to using common sense,” advised Dr. Mark Leavy, Mercy Medical Center internist.

“Yes, it really does,” agreed Caitlin Felice, out-patient dietician for St. Joseph Hospital’s Diabetes Management Center.

She notes, however, that diabetics need to be especially watchful of what and how much they eat and drink over the holidays.

“What tends to happen is that they eat out of their usual meal plan, and so they face an increased risk,” Felice said. “It’s not so much that they may overindulge on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day or New Year’s, but that it may become a seasonal problem, not just two or three days out of two months.”

In other words, treat yourself a little on those days but don’t let it become a habit.

According to a recent Weight Watchers report, the average American gains around 7-10 pounds between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day, weight that is maintained from thereon despite promises to go on or back to a diet in January.

“People can still enjoy these holiday meals and not put their health at risk,” Leavy said, “if they simply take some common sense precautions such as limiting their meal portions and eating a variety of foods rather than simply stuffing themselves with meat and mashed potatoes.”

And, he said, exercise is important.

“Don’t just sit on the couch after that large meal; get up and do something, like play with the kids or play a little football rather than watch it,” he said.

For diabetics, Felice suggested using diabetic-friendly holiday recipes (many of which can be found on the Internet) that include using sugar substitutes.

“You can have ham, but it doesn’t have to be glazed ham, for example,” she said. “You can use something like diet Sprite instead of honey or sugar glaze. And, you can try mashed cauliflower instead of mashed potatoes. Most people can hardly tell the difference.”

Felice and Leavy offer some other tips.

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