

Holiday Habits May Increase Your Risk for Heart Attack & Stroke

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The holidays are here, which can mean an uphill battle for staying healthy. Americans put on extra pounds during this time of year thanks to a surplus of foods that are usually full of cholesterol, sugar and saturated fat. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), a recent study suggests that extra holiday weight accumulates through the years and may be a major contributor to obesity later in life. The study also suggested that the holiday season may present special risks for those who are already overweight¹.

Many Americans take time off from work to relax during the holidays. While everyone needs and deserves a bit of rest, it is important to keep a steady level of physical activity in your day. No matter the occasion, decreased physical activity and high cholesterol can increase risk for Peripheral Arterial Disease (P.A.D.), a major risk factor for heart attack and stroke. In fact, people with P.A.D. have a two to six times greater chance of death from a heart attack or a stroke². This disease occurs when the arteries in the legs become narrowed or clogged with fatty deposits. A regular walking routine can reduce stress and help you relax while controlling your blood glucose, blood pressure, cholesterol and body weight, and lowering your chances of having a heart attack, stroke or P.A.D. Make time in your holiday schedule to walk at least 3 to 5 times per week and continue this routine year round.

If you work up an appetite during your invigorating walk, do your best to resist tempting sugary treats. The holidays may seem like a tough time to eat well, but this can be an ideal time to establish and continue healthy eating habits. This winter, commit yourself to following a heart-healthy eating plan that has lots of fruits, vegetables and low total fat and cholesterol to decrease your risk for P.A.D. and other health problems.

Symptoms of P.A.D. include muscle cramping during exercise, numbness, weakness or heaviness in the muscles—but many people do not experience any symptoms at all. Risk factors for P.A.D. include smoking, a family history of cardiovascular disease or having Diabetes. If you are worried that you might have P.A.D., don't hesitate to talk to your physician about having a PADnet™+ exam. The BioMedix™ PADnet™+ exam is a non-invasive test for P.A.D. that takes just 15–20 minutes during a regular office visit. It's pain-free and can help you adjust your lifestyle to your specific health needs, based on your physician's findings.

Stay active and healthy so that you can continue to spend time with family and friends for years to come. Stick to your diet and exercise routine this holiday season and you'll be able to add *good health* to the list of things for which you can give thanks.

1. NIH. (2010). Holiday weight gain slight, but may last a lifetime. Retrieved from <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/news/releases/holidayweightgain.cfm>.

2. P.A.D. Coalition. Life saving tips about...Peripheral Arterial Disease (P.A.D.). Retrieved from <http://www.padcoalition.org/downloads/pdf/pad-facts.pdf>,

For more information about P.A.D., visit www.PADCoalition.org.

