



December 2008

## Our Guide to a Heart Healthy Holiday

With the winter holidays fast approaching, we offer you *DIETS* - our tips on how to make this a safe and heart healthy holiday season.

### Diet

It is very easy to indulge during the holidays. As heart patients, though, it is important to adhere to portion control. Eat and be happy - but do not overdo it. Try to maintain a heart healthy diet. Fresh fruits and vegetables are healthier options than extra servings of cookies and pie.

### Intake

A 2004 study published in Circulation found that there is an increase in cardiac mortalities during the holidays (the full article can be found at <http://www.circ.ahajournals.org/cgi/content/full/110/25/3781>). The reason for the rise in heart related deaths is multifactorial. One contributing factor, however, is the holiday diet. Many of the holiday favorites, like honey glazed hams and casseroles, are often made with canned vegetables which are loaded in salt. Excess sodium intake can cause fluid imbalances which can then develop into heart failure. People in heart failure often feel tired and are short of breath. They may also notice swelling of their hands and feet.

Alcohol plays another role in the rise in heart related fatalities during the holidays. Binge drinking or excessive alcohol intake can often trigger disturbances in a person's heart rhythm. Oftentimes, atrial fibrillation, an abnormal heart rhythm, can develop after excessive alcohol use. If you drink a glass of wine during the holidays, do so in moderation and respect your symptoms.

### Exercise

In a study published in the March 23, 2000 edition of the New England Journal of Medicine, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) concluded that most Americans gain an average of 1 pound each holiday season (<http://www.nichd.nih.gov/news/releases/holidayweightgain.cfm>). This differs from popular belief of people gaining

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five to ten pounds during the holidays. Unfortunately, most Americans do not lose that extra "holiday" pound. Instead, the extra weight accumulates year after year.

So, remember to exercise and try burn off those extra calories.

## Travel

Before you embark on your holiday travels:

Talk to your primary care provider about whether you need your flu, pneumonia, or shingles vaccines.

Pack your medications on your carry-on luggage.

Bring a copy of your medical history and your physicians contact information (Cardiology of Virginia 804-560-8782).

Remember to get up, stretch, and move your legs if you are in an airplane, automobile, or train for a prolonged period of time. This will help maintain keep your blood circulation in your legs.

## Symptoms

This is a busy time of the year, and people often ignore the way they feel. Do not delay in seeking medical attention. Always respect your symptoms.

**Make this a safe and heart healthy holiday season.**

**Happy Holidays!**

From The Physicians and Staff at Cardiology of Virginia