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TALK TO THE MIRROR



FLORINE MARK

Easy tips for beating the holiday bulge

It all started two months ago when we stocked our shelves with Halloween candy and couldn't resist those candy canes that stared us in the face for weeks. And the eating doesn't seem to slow down until the last bit of chips and dip is thrown away Jan. 1.

It may seem like heaven — nonstop eating of junk food for weeks on end. But only until we step onto the scales and are slapped with reality.

Well, we've got a couple of weeks left of parties, family get-togethers and gift baskets all centered around food. You may think it's impossible, but you can enjoy the holidays and not gain a pound.

Here are some "stay slim" strategies to help you trim the fat from your holidays.

Before The Party:

- **Eat Before You Go** — Rather than starving yourself all day so you can indulge at a dinner party that night, eat a light, healthy lunch and breakfast that day so you don't walk into the party famished. Try to have some nonfat yogurt or a piece of fruit about 30 minutes before your meal. If the party is just cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, eat something hearty and healthy before you leave home. Try a baked potato, large salad or bowl of soup.
- **Dress in Something Snug Around the Waist** — A snug feeling around your waist will make it uncomfortable to eat too much.

At The Party:

- **Avoid Alcoholic Beverages** — In the next few weeks, if you attend two or three parties a week and drink two glasses of liquor at each, by the end of the season you'll have consumed more than half a pound of extra weight. Besides that, alcohol stimulates your appetite.
- **Stay at Least an Arm's Length Away from the Buffet** — This will keep you from any nervous nibbling.
- **Cut Back on Appetizers** — Did you know that one ounce of bris cheese melted on a hunk of French bread packs over 100 calories and nine grams of fat? Add that to the chip dip and fondue and you may need to run to the store for some new clothes before dinner is served. Moderation is the key. Make a conscious decision at the buffet table and either choose a few favorites or sample a variety of hors d'oeuvres in small portions.

- **B.Y.O.A.** — Score points with the host or hostess by offering to bring your own appetizer. Something low fat and healthy like veggies and dip (made with fat-free sour cream and spices) or a tray of sliced fruit gives you control over choices. That way you can fill up without filling out.
- **Don't Flatter the Cook by Cleaning Your Plate** — Instead, ask the cook for the recipe. Your host will be thrilled.
- **Eat Slowly** — Put down your fork between bites and join the conversation. It takes 20 minutes for food signals to reach your brain and tell you if you are full. Eating slowly will let your brain catch up to your stomach.

- **Don't Eat Just Because the People Around You are Eating** — If you aren't hungry, sip sparkling water or fruit juice.
- **Desert? Share it With a Friend** — If a piece of pumpkin pie looks too good to pass up, split a piece with a friend or eat only the filling and leave the crust. Almost 2/3 of the calories in a piece of pie are in the pie crust alone.

Throughout the Season:

- **Exercise** — Every bit of physical activity helps during the holidays. Exercise not only burns those extra holiday calories and fat, but it's also helpful in relieving stress, which is often abundant during this season. If you're at a party with music, dance the night away.
- **Plan and Stick to a Grocery List** — Avoid impulse purchases such as packaged holiday cookies and chocolates to "have on hand" during the holidays.
- **The most important thing is to enjoy the company of friends and family.** You don't need a lot of food to do that. And if you do slip up and eat something you hadn't planned on having, don't feel guilty. Just move on, recognize what made you slip and make a change.

I hope you have a happy, healthy holiday and that the warmth of the season fills your heart, not your waistline.

I read every one of your letters and I love your comments! Please keep writing me with any questions, inspirational stories or suggestions for upcoming articles to: "Talk to the Mirror," Weight Watchers Corporate Communications, P.O. Box 9072, Farmington Hills, Mich. 48334-2974, or fax: (248) 553-7106.

Fitness races with technology

BY RENA FULKA
SPECIAL WRITER

Once she enters her pin number in the Life Fitness kiosk, Mera Kerekanch is ready to begin her own specially tailored workout program on a high tech network of computerized exercise equipment.

Whether she's pumping iron, biking or walking the treadmill, Kerekanch can watch as the lighted control panel on each apparatus monitors and graphs her progress. The detailed results, which include figures for heart rate, resistance level, muscle use and the number of calories burned, can then be printed out for future reference.

An avid workout enthusiast, Kerekanch joined the Farmington Family YMCA in Farmington Hills when she moved to Oakland County four years ago, coming for workouts twice a week and supplementing her program by exercising at home. Since the new Life Fitness equipment was installed four weeks ago, Kerekanch has increased her visits to four times a week. "The equipment they've put in now is phenomenal," said the Farmington Hills homemaker. "It's state of the art and there's a lot of it, so there's no waiting."

The Life Fitness computerized network is part of the branch's \$250,000 redesign project prompted by consumer need and advancing technology in the fitness industry.

"This is a revolutionary complete circuit apparatus," said Mandi Skeogan of West Bloomfield, membership/community relations director. "We are the only Y in Michigan to have this equipment. We plan on programming and monitoring our whole membership base."

Members enter the system by completing a brief evaluation. Once the profile is set, each apparatus is programmed to maintain the proper level of use.

"I won't let you damage yourself," said Kevin Bush, the branch's executive director. "That's why it's like having a personal trainer with you."

In addition to monitoring club members, the central kiosk offers a video of each piece of exercise equipment and suggests the proper apparatus for building endurance for a specific sport.

John Oman of Farmington Hills joined the YMCA when it opened for business in 1980. A boilermaker by profession, Oman works out 60 minutes a day, six days a week, paying little heed



STAFF PHOTOS BY TOM HOEFMETER

Computer controlled: Fitness specialist Ingrid Laan instructs John Oman of Farmington Hills on the use of a new Life Fitness apparatus, which is tied into a central kiosk for high tech monitoring. After exercising, printouts are available for the users.

to the computerized network being utilized around him. "I'm past the computer age," said the father of four grown children. "And I don't have a set routine."

Though he agreed to try the Life Fitness apparatus under the guidance of fitness evaluator Ingrid Laan, Oman prefers to spend his time working out on the updated equipment that bears no ties to a central kiosk.

Whether they spend their time with the high tech system or working out on the non-computerized models, members of the YMCA share a common interest.

"People who come here are people who want to be healthy," said Bush. "They're people who want to be in a family atmosphere and in a place where they do not feel intimidated, but feel welcome. That's what we try to provide."

Chartered in 1955 as a branch of the

YMCA of Metropolitan Detroit, the Farmington Hills location operated from community space in schools and churches until opening its doors at 28100 Farmington Road. The original 58,000-square-foot facility was expanded in 1987 and 1993 to encompass 65,000 square feet and reflect the community's needs and wants.

"It was the first YMCA to start a Wellness Center concept in 1987," said Bush. "The concept was to have an area within the facility where we could give personal attention to members with state of the art equipment."

The Life Fitness computerized network of exercise equipment will be featured in January on "Who, What, Where, Why." The three-hour cable television program is broadcast on Channel 12 at 5:30 p.m. on Mondays and 8 p.m. on Wednesdays.



State of the art: The control panels on the computerized Life Fitness machine chart an individual's progress, which can then be printed out for future reference.

Obesity has no cure yet, keep tabs on lifestyle, diet

For the first time in American history, more people are overweight than thin. This "growing" trend unfortunately applies to children as well as adults. With the advent of diet, weight loss programs, medicine and other technology, it's easy to believe that the obesity puzzle should be solved.

The country, however, is no better off than in 1958 when Dr. Albert Stunkard, renowned obesity researcher, concluded: "Most obese persons will not stay in treatment. Of those who stay in treatment, most will not lose weight; and of those who do lose weight, most will regain it."

Obesity has been studied psychologically, genetically and socially, all to no avail. A grant deal has been leased about how obesity becomes overweight, various weight-loss programs, theories, and the failures of dieting. The end result remains the same: we are an overweight, out-of-shape society.

For those with weight problems, there are numerous barriers to overcome. Both psychological and social issues arise: people are always surrounded by food. Food is an integral part of American society. From media exposure to "What restaurant do you want to go to?" socializing with food is as American as apple pie.

This becomes a real challenge during the holiday season when the average American gains upwards of 10 pounds between Thanksgiving and the New Year. With high-calorie holiday dinners, office parties and constant entertaining, the unwanted pounds easily arrive.

If the holiday season ends with only a couple of extra pounds, other issues yet remain in the obesity war. One is genetics. Some people are simply genetically

pre-disposed to obesity; weight problems tend to run in families. Another is body appearance — those long, slender legs "die for," the flat stomach, the perfectly proportioned body most are not blessed with.

OK, your body type and genes are a given. What other issues exist? The work milieu is a test of "skillpower." (I don't believe in the concept "willpower." I promise to further examine this in my next column.) At work, surrounded by candy dishes, doughnuts at the coffeepot, and the smell of microwave popcorn, determination not to cave in is paramount.

At home, the media "feed" temptation. Every other TV commercial is about "mouthwatering," "delicious," "fresh-tasting" food. On the radio, you hear about the "fresh new taste of..." All the senses are bombarded.

Space doesn't allow other significant barriers to be addressed: discrimination against overweight individuals, our obsession with thinness and other social issues.

Bottom line, it's not easy being overweight. Obesity continues to be a major problem in America, with no quick fixes or magic pills on the horizon.

Until researchers discover why obesity exists, the best advice is to modify your lifestyle. Advice given in a medical textbook called *Hygienic Physiology*, written in 1872, is acutely applicable 125 years later:

"A sedentary occupation necessitates less food than out-door life. One not accustomed to manual labor should practice self-denial until his system becomes fitted to the new order of things... You may stuff the stomach to the full, year after year, but as sure as effects follow causes, so sure will you reap the accumulating penalty."

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New Year often causes desire to quit smoking

As the new year approaches, many people will begin to make important decisions about health and lifestyle changes.

In order to make those choices easier, Blue Cross Blue Shield and Blue Care Network of Michigan suggests that you take a close look at some startling facts concerning the harmful effects of smoking and what you can do to kick the nicotine habit.

Statistics show that tobacco is the source of three in ten cancer deaths in the United States. Research also indicates that on average, smokers live seven years less than nonsmokers and have double the risk of a subsequent heart attack or death. Smoking also lowers HDL, the so-called "good" cholesterol.

Smoking is a risk factor for many other health problems, including stroke, heart disease and damage to vital organs. Statistics show that 85 percent of all lung cancer cases are caused by smoking. Persistent cough shortness of breath and chest pain are often caused by smoking.

Medical experts indicate that smoking significantly increases the risk of breast cancer, since some women have a genetic susceptibility to the carcinogens in cigarettes. Evidence further indicates that smoking can also alter certain hormone levels in women.

"Most people are familiar with the link between smoking and lung cancer," said Dexter W. Shurney, M.D., vice president and corporate medical director for the Blues. "But many are not aware of the high rates of cancer of the larynx, bladder, esophagus, pancreas,

mouth and tongue." Research further indicates that second-hand smoke causes nonsmokers to inhale more dangerous substances than smokers. It has also been found that children who are exposed to cigarette smoke have frequent ear infections and are more prone to other health problems, including asthma.

If you quit smoking, you can reduce your risk of health problems and help those around you.

Regardless of whether a person quits "cold turkey" or gradually cuts down, the following tips are helpful in getting started.

Decide how and when you will quit by setting a realistic target date.

Figure out why you smoke. Do you smoke to pep yourself up or to relax?

List specific reasons for quitting.

Plan things to do when you get the urge to smoke. Ask your physician about the many new products available that are designed to help people quit smoking.

Many people use the nicotine patch, which gradually releases nicotine into the bloodstream through the skin. It is reported that the patch is useful for people who have had serious withdrawal problems, such as headaches, anxiety, depression or insomnia. This method should always be used with a good smoking cessation program.

"When you try to kick the smoking habit, don't be too discouraged if slip ups occur," cautions Dr. Shurney. "And most important of all," he adds, "never give up."