

Does Holiday Feasting Affect Obesity Rates?

By ACSH Staff — November 24, 2015



[1]

Calories via Shutterstock

Thanksgiving is a few days away. It's the time of year when we ring in the holiday season by bringing together families, football, and pumpkin pie.

Does it also ring in more obesity?

People do eat a lot more between Thanksgiving and New Years and more calories consumed with the same calories burned means weight will go up, but is that really leading to a spike in obesity as some claim?

Prior research has shown that people usually gain about a pound each holiday season, but they try very hard to shed it in the new year. [A study that was published](#) [2] in the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing* focuses on separating eating habits into different brackets distinguishing the weekend from the week, and holidays from day-to-day eating habits, will probably explain why we have different rules for ourselves on special occasions.

The study stated that the 84 percent of people who attempt to bracket their eating behaviors, and then apply different standards within holiday and weekend periods, may be adding on the pounds. They collected data from 601 people who kept food diaries for two week-long periods a year apart, (of those 262 kept food diaries for a week that included a holiday), some people were consuming more than 900 calories more on the special occasion than during the regular workweek.

J. Jeffrey Inman, Associate Dean for Research and Marketing at the University of Pittsburgh, believes it is due to the way the nutrition information is given both in public health guidelines and on food packaging which leads to people viewing their food consumption within the restraints of a single day. In other words, the most basic eating bracket is a 24-hour period so on an individual basis, eating habits might be influenced by a broader time frame. An example of such would include people who like to mix up richer meals with lighter meals as a force of habit.

Inman and co-author Adwait Khare, marketing professor at Quinnipiac University, say that the rules we apply to weekday brackets do not carry forth into weekends. On average, they found that

people tend to consume more calories on the weekends, incurring a 9 percent increase, specifically regarding breakfast. This change in eating patterns could be related to the relaxed feel of the weekend, and likelihood to indulge a bit as a reward for all of the hard work put in the previous week, as well as the increased probability of going out to eat.

Of course, not everyone views the weekend as a bracket for binge eating. There are individuals who view the weekend as a time to enjoy healthy meals due to having more time for food preparation.

And though people tend to conceptually view this period as a time for indulgence, not all holidays have equal calorie counts. They broke down holidays into three categories: civic, such as Martin Luther King Day or Veterans Day; eating holidays, such as Thanksgiving and Christmas; and mixed, referring to Labor Day or the Fourth of July. Civic holidays differ little from weekdays but the average person consumes seven percent more on mixed holidays, and 14 percent more on eating holidays.

Adults between the ages of 25 and 35 were most likely to show a sizable increase in calorie consumption on weekends and increased caloric intake generally corresponded to higher body mass index. Also, obese individuals over indulged at a higher level during weekends and holidays.

So holidays do add to obesity but once the weight is on those people tend to just concede that they are already fat and that one meal won't make a difference.

Instead, it may be that the extra cookie or pastry on the weekends is what really add up.

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