

HEALTH MATTERS

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For Your Health

BY DR. RICHARD N. WALDMAN



Holiday Digestive Woes

During the holiday season, delicious and decadent foods are everywhere. Foods that have the potential to throw the digestive system for a loop are all around.

Problems such as constipation, diarrhea, heartburn, and gas occur more frequently in women than in men and may be made worse by changes in hormone levels caused by menstruation and pregnancy. Women are also more likely to develop irritable bowel syndrome, a common digestive disorder marked by persistent abdominal pain and bowel changes. Sufferers of this ailment may have a strong digestive reaction to stress, large meals, caffeine, dairy products, and large amounts of alcohol—typical staples of the holiday season. Try these tips to avoid seasonal digestive consequences:

Eating large meals and not get-

ting enough fiber can trigger constipation. The Fix: Eat at least 25 grams of fiber each day, drink plenty of fluids, exercise, and use the bathroom when you have the urge. Your doctor may also prescribe laxatives or other therapies.

You may develop a case of diarrhea—defined as having three or more loose bowel movements in a day—after eating or drinking foods that contain harmful viruses or bacteria. Dairy products, caffeine, artificial sweeteners, certain additives, or medications such as antibiotics can also be a cause. The Fix: Eat hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Skip foods that have been sitting out on the buffet too long. If you have diarrhea, drink fluids to keep hydrated. Drink liquids that contain salt such as sports drinks or broth if diarrhea lasts more than a few hours. Avoid drinks that include dairy

products, caffeine, or sugar which can make diarrhea worse.

Rich, fatty, or acidic foods, chocolate, coffee, alcohol, mints, and big meals can cause stomach acid to push back into your esophagus and may lead to heartburn, a burning feeling in your chest and throat. The Fix: Avoid overeating. Instead of lying down after a meal, try taking a walk.

Gas and bloating can be triggered by hard-to-digest foods such as beans, broccoli, cabbage, and dairy products (for lactose intolerant people). The Fix: Pay attention to which foods give you gas and avoid them. Your doctor may suggest an over-the-counter treatment.

Talk to your doctor if your abdominal or digestive discomfort persists.

Dr. Richard N. Waldman is president of the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

HEALTH WATCH

Stroke Alert Screening -- Check your carotid arteries with a painless ultrasound to assess your risk. Fee \$40. To schedule a screening, call 503-251-6137.

Empowerment through Relaxation -- Free informal meditation classes that address breathing techniques, some gentle ancient African yoga poses and mental balancing techniques -- People have left these classes joyful and with a peaceful view of their lives. Call Dr. Marcelitte Failla at 503-228-6140.

Powerful Tools For Caregivers -- 6-week educational series designed to help family caregivers take care of themselves while caring for relatives or friends with chronic illness. Class size is limited, and registration is required. Call 503-413-8018.

Leg Alert Screening -- Check for peripheral arterial disease with this safe, simple screening using ankle and arm blood pressure. The fee is \$40. To schedule an appointment, call 503-251-6137.

Smoke-Free Support Group -- Meets Mondays, 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. For information, call 503-256-4000.

Heart Talk Support Group -- Meets on the second Monday of each month; from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. For more information, call 503-251-6260.

Family Caregiver Support Group -- This topic-oriented group offers a safe place to discuss the stresses, challenges and rewards of providing care to an older relative or friend. Meets the first Thursday of each month at 3 p.m. at Legacy Good Samaritan Hospital. Chronic Pain Support Group -- Meets the first Wednesday at 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. and the third Wednesday of each month, from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. For more information, call 503-256-4000.

Cholesterol Profiles -- Get the resources to help you keep an eye on your cholesterol and other indicators of heart health. Educational material provided. For more information, call 503-261-6611.

Bereavement Support Groups -- Free, safe confidential group meetings for those who have experienced the death of a loved one offered on various nights and locations. For information and registration, call 503-215-4622.

Maternity Water Workout -- Helping new moms regain muscle tone, strength, and flexibility, all in the support and freedom of the water. Call 503-256-4000 for more information.

Senior Aerobics -- A low-impact workout geared specifically toward seniors. Call 503-449-0783 for current schedule.

Osteoporosis Screening -- An ultrasound bone density screening with personalized education; fee \$30. To schedule an appointment, call 503-261-6611.

Mind Body Health Class -- Learn and practice techniques to help you improve your mood, health and wellbeing, including effective ways to manage difficult emotions and chronic stress or illness. Registration is \$70 for Kaiser Permanente members and \$95 for nonmembers. Call 503-286-6816.

Red Cross Certification -- The Oregon Trail Chapter Red Cross now offers credits to help professionals maintain licensing or certification. For a cumulative list, visit pdxinfo.net.

Tenderfoot Care -- Treat your feet with a soak, nail trim, buffing and massage from a licensed nurse at one of six clinics or at your home. Call 503-251-6303 for more information.

Cancer Resource Center -- Providence St. Vincent Medical Center and the American Red Cross have joined forces to create the first in-hospital resource center providing books, printed material, computer access and more for individuals and families dealing with cancer. The center is open Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.