

Alberta Healthy Living Program (Diversity, Mandarin, and Cantonese)

- ✓ **Project: Tentative pre-recorded interview in Mandarin with the host at Fairchild Radio, FM 947**
- ✓ **Total airtime: 20 minutes however only given 10 minutes to present information.**
- ✓ **Pre-recording date: 2024 November 26.**
- ✓ **Broadcasting month: December 2024 and January 2025**
- ✓ **Suggested topic: Enjoying Delicious and Healthy Holiday Season without the Holiday Weight Gain!**

Introduction:

It's almost that time of the year again! With the holidays on our minds, it's a good time to start making action plans to stay on track with your health goals through the season.

As to be expected, the holiday season is **often full of high-calorie or sugary treats**, and with a **constant stream of food available at parties and gatherings**, it is often easy to lose track of what, when and how much we eat. **The lack of a routine during the holidays** was another factor that for some people, this can lead to **unwanted weight gain during holidays**.

Disrupted schedules, less regular exercise, and increased stress levels can lead to mindless eating and poor food choices. The most important thing is, many factors can make navigating the holidays challenging, regardless of whether you have a weight loss goal in mind or just want to stay healthy during this season. But learning **how to cope with these pressures** will help you stay on track with your health goals.

Is It Normal to Gain Weight Over the Holidays?

Weight gain over the holidays can be common, especially if you find yourself off track from November to January. For some cultures, the holidays may last even longer. In 2025, the lunar new year falls on January 29, year of the snake and celebrations last up to 16 days!

For some people, taking a few precautions and keeping some extra practices in mind to achieve a healthy balance lifestyle, a few extra pounds here and there can be a result of temporary weight shifts over a short span of a few days. However, if **weight gained persists over several months, this is more likely to be true weight gain.**

It's important to keep in mind that we all have our own unique health goals and to remember not to panic if you see a slight increase on the scale. Instead, it's more about focusing on the bigger picture and **enjoying things in healthy moderation rather than striving for perfection. All food fits in moderation!**

What are the strategies you would recommend helping me eat well for weight and health over the holidays season?

The common tips I would usually suggest combatting Holiday Weight Gain are:

- **Follow the 80/20 rule:**

aim to make sure 80 percent of your meals align with your regular health routine and goals. To put this into practice, I enjoy a small portion of my favorite treats and fill the other 80 percent of my plate with nutritious foods.

- **Plan ahead:**

help me make sure I **stick to my plan, make better food choices, and avoid overeating.** For me, this looks like **eating a light snack of fiber and protein before a holiday party** that I know may have lots of high-calorie treats can **help keep my blood sugar levels regulated** and can curb my appetite so that I **avoid mindless eating.**

- **Stay active:**

Keep moving, any exercise that you enjoy. Be it a walk, a swim or taichi. Consider how exercise will help you **feel better and more energized** after a big meal.

- **Practice portion control:**

While I love to enjoy my favorite holiday foods as much as the next person, I always try to **do so in moderation.** I like to start by making sure I include a **variety of**

colorful veggies (with dressing at the side) and **lean protein** such as chicken, fish, **legumes on my plate** and then opt for **smaller portions of high-calorie foods and sweet treats**.

- **Stay hydrated:**

Drink adequate and regular water throughout the day can help you feel fuller and avoid overeating. Good hydration is important for overall good health.

Limit intake of alcohol and high calories beverages, they can be high in calories and added sugar, making it easier to push your healthy habits to the side.

There are healthier alternatives, such as infused water, **tea, herbal tea, black coffee, low fat milk, unsweetened plant-based beverage or club soda**.

- **Stay mindful and be flexible with your holiday meals:**

I often would **slow down and savor each bite** of my food, **stop eating when I feel satisfied** rather than overly full.

When it comes to the holidays, understand that **perfection is not the goal and that occasional indulgences are part of a balanced lifestyle**. If you do overindulge in one meal, accept it, move on, and get back on track with your healthy choices. It's more about the **accumulation of your food choices over time** rather than singling out one or two events.

I was often being told losing weight is easy. A person's body weight is related to how much you eat and how much you exercise. Is this true?

Research studies have shown that there are many factors affecting weight. It is **more complicated than we thought**. Weight gain or lose is **not about energy in and energy out**.

There are many factors that may affect an individual's weight and to name a few such as **diet and exercise, genetics, medical conditions and disability, medications (which can increase / decrease appetite or slow / increase the metabolism), physical / mental / emotional stress and sleep, tobacco, drugs**.

Should I fast to lose weight?

The short answer is no. **Fasting is when you consume very little or no food and drink for a period of time.** There are many different types of fasting.

The most important thing to understand is **when you fast, your metabolism** (the rate that your body burns energy) **slows down**. A slower metabolism means that **when you go back to your usual way of eating, you are likely to gain weight**. After you fast, you will also **feel hungrier and be more likely to overeat**.

Fasting for an extended period of time, you may **become dehydrated, get headaches, become weak and dizzy, be low in nutrients, lose muscle, have lower immune function which leads to higher risk of catching a cold/ flu.**

What is a trendy (fad) diet?

*A trendy (fad) diet is **a popular diet that usually promises weight loss**. A trendy (fad) diet often **does not follow healthy eating guidelines that support good health and well-being**. It sounds “too good to be true” if it*

- *Promises weight loss of more than 2 pounds (1 kg) per week.*
- *Restricts you to less than 800 calories a day.*
- *Cuts out major food categories (like gluten or carbohydrates) and stops you from enjoying your favourite foods.*
- *Does not encourage physical activity.*
- *Does not provide support for long-term weight loss success.*
- *Is rigid and does not fit into your lifestyle or state of health.*
- *Pressurizing you to buy the company’s foods or supplements rather than show you how to make better choices from a grocery store.*

Are there any special diets such as Bowel Cleansing which you would recommend helping with weight loss and to keep digestive system healthy?

A bowel cleanse is used to **remove waste from the bowel or colon**. Bowel cleanses are **not recommended** for weight loss, disease prevention, or to keep your digestive system

healthy. There is no evidence that they help, and some cleansing products and diets may even have negative side effects.

Unless your physician has recommended a bowel cleanse to get ready for bowel surgery or a colonoscopy, your body does not need bowel cleanses to remove stool or toxins. Your body does this naturally. Bowel cleanses should only be done under the supervision of a physician.

I was told that carbohydrates are as bad as eating sugar, they caused weight gain! I have been avoiding eating them since.

Carbohydrates like protein and fat **are equally essential** in our diets. It is important to consume adequate carbohydrates every day as they act as the main source of energy used by our bodies.

Carbohydrates occur naturally in nutritious foods such as grains, fruits, starchy vegetables, legumes and dairy.

Whole grains are packed with nutrients such as **fibre, protein and B-vitamins**. The benefits include helping us to stay healthy and full longer.

Fruits and vegetables are packed with fibre, vitamins and minerals, while legumes are versatile plant-based protein and fibre sources. Dairy products such as milk and yogurt are packed with complete protein, calcium and vitamin D and the benefits include keeping our bones strong and healthy.

But carbohydrate foods are not created equal. **Carbohydrate-rich foods such as baked goods, desserts, candies, chips do not provide many essential nutrients and should therefore be limited.**

Over the holidays season, I will be busy, and it is often I would miss a meal or two. Should I take vitamin and mineral supplements to make sure that I meet the nutrients required for my body instead?

When we eat a variety of nutritious foods, taking vitamin and mineral supplements are not generally required.

Taking supplements cannot make up for unhealthy eating habits such as skipping meals, emotional eating, excessively snacking. Canada's Food Guide recommends vegetables and fruits, whole-grain foods, and protein foods as part of a nutritious food plan.

With the flu season in a full swing, can taking vitamin C and zinc prevent me from getting sick?

Almost all nutrients help the immune system in one way or another. Some research suggests that vitamin C and zinc may help reduce the duration of a cold and the severity of some symptoms.

For most people, however, there is no good evidence that taking more of these nutrients than what you can get from a nutritious diet will improve your immune system.

*It's best to check with your dietitian or health care provider before taking any supplements. **Zinc can be toxic in high doses and taking more than 2,000 mg of vitamin C per day can have side effects like diarrhea.***

When should we take a supplement?

A supplement may be recommended by your healthcare team to help fill in the gaps such as an individual who cannot or do not eat a variety of foods because of food allergies or who eat a vegan diet, women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

A vitamin and mineral supplement provide a variety of nutrients that are also found in many common foods we eat. These supplements are often called multivitamins, and they come in the form of pills, chewable tablets, powders, and liquids.

Alberta Health Services recommend getting 200IU vitamin D from a variety of food sources each day in addition to taking vitamin D supplements, and the amount of vitamin D you need depends on your age:

Ages 0 to 50 years: 400IU of vitamin D supplement each day.

Ages over 50 years: 1000IU of vitamin D supplement each day.

How do I know if the supplements I am taking are safe? Can supplements be dangerous?

Number 1, is there a **Natural Product Number (NPN)** on the package of the supplements? An NPN is an 8-digit number found on some supplement packages sold in Canada. Health Canada indicate products with an NPN are safe and effective if you follow the instructions / directions on the label. But these products may still have side effects when mixed with other medicines or alcohol.

Number 2, have you read the fine print on the package of the supplements? Many supplements have **extra ingredients** added to the supplement. If you have a food allergy or intolerance to certain ingredients, it is important to check the ingredient list to make sure it is safe for you to take. Even though over the counter supplements are not prescription, they should still be treated as such. **Speak with your pharmacist first** before taking any supplement.

For some supplements, if you take too much, you may experience unpleasant side effects. For example, having over 2000 mg of **vitamin C** may cause gut problems like diarrhea. **Magnesium** in higher doses may also cause diarrhea. Speak to your physician or pharmacist before starting a higher dose supplement to make sure it is right for you.

Is there a difference between natural and laboratory (synthetic) made vitamins?

There is no difference between a vitamin made in a laboratory (synthetic) vs one in its natural form. Once ingested into the body, these vitamins are used in the same way and for the same functions.

However the bioavailability of the vitamins and minerals is not the same getting from food vs supplements. For example, the iron absorption we gather from food is often lower than iron supplement.

Do you have any additional information which I should watch for before I purchase a supplement?

1. **No supplement has been proved to cure diseases** such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, or digestive problems. Always stay cautious of supplements that promise quick and dramatic results.
2. **A generic brand** (or store brand) often works just as well as a name-brand supplement. Look for generic brands that contain the same amount of vitamins and minerals as the name brand.

Before we round up, in addition to eating a well-balanced meal, what kind of lifestyle should one adopt to stay healthy over the holidays season?

In addition to eating healthy, being **physically active, having good sleep and stress management** are also important. Speak to your physician or healthcare team if you feel you might have anxiety or depression.

How can Alberta Healthy Living Program help support the Chinese in the community?

- We have Registered Dietitian speaking both Mandarin and Cantonese who can offer one-on-one advice via phone, Zoom or in person meeting.
- These services have no charge and are covered by Alberta Health. You do not need a referral from a health care provider - you can just call to book appointment.
- All our programs and services can be accessed through one toll-free number: 1-844-527-1160.
- Better choices, better health (BCBH) for chronic disease management and BCBH-chronic pain that are offered in Cantonese, and they can register for this 6-week program (one 2.5-hour session per week) by calling one toll-free: 1-844-527-1160.