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Consistent routines help keep extra pounds off during winter months

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Canadian Press: Lauren La Rose, THE CANADIAN PRESS

TORONTO - As we settle into the colder temperatures of winter, some people may be seeing an unwelcome increase in the size of their waistslines.

Shorter days and chillier outdoor conditions make it all the more challenging to suit up and hit the gym or streets for a workout - especially when it means leaving the confines of a toasty, warm home to do it.

"We do tend to gain more



Trainer

Joseph Valtellini helps John Tulloch during a work out at a gym

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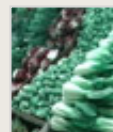
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in Toronto, Friday Jan.8, 2008. As temperatures plunge during the winter months, some people see an unwelcome increase in the size of their waistlines. Health and wellness experts weigh in on why some people pack on the pounds during the frosty months and serve up their strategies to keep fitness levels up - and the numbers on the scale down. THE CANADIAN PRESS/
Adrian Wyld

weight in the winter because we're eating more starchy foods, more comfort foods, and often times, grabbing the wrong types of foods," said Toronto nutritionist Joey Shulman. "People do tend to pack on more."

While there is data to support the winter weight gain theory, the gains may not be as much as anecdotally believed, said Dr. Diane Finegood, scientific director of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes.

She said that while most people believe they gain about five pounds over the holidays and winter months, a study conducted in the U.S. revealed participants only gained about a pound.

"It's probably some different subset of factors that change between the summer and the winter months that contributes to their change of behaviour," said Finegood, who is also a professor at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, B.C.



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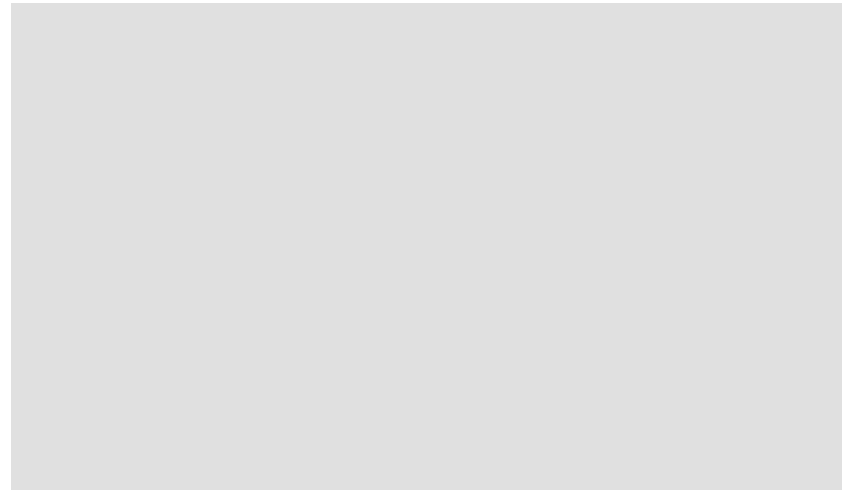
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"For some of us, it might be a combination of comfort foods and the weather outside, in other individuals it might be something else."

Finegood said a researcher is being funded through CIHR to examine walking behaviour during the summer and winter months to better understand what contributes to changes.

A recent study from the U.S.-based National Institute of Mental Health found some individuals may not be able to process leptin, a hormone known for regulating appetite and speeding up metabolism, as well during the winter. While researchers aren't sure exactly why this is the case, they agree reduced leptin production can pave the path towards an appetite boost, consequently making you gain weight.

Getting in extra winks can help boost leptin production, which is created when you sleep, as well as increasing zinc intake.

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In Shulman's latest book, "The Last 15: A Weight Loss Breakthrough," she recommends the first step for those looking to shed pounds is taking 30 days to rev up your metabolic engine.

That includes ensuring you're eating breakfast, enjoying a protein at every meal, eating at least one high-fibre whole grain and not eating past 7 p.m., as late-night eating can compromise digestion and energy.

When it comes to cutting cravings, she recommends trying chewable vitamin C or sipping on a green or herbal tea. But if you are in need of something sweet, indulge the urge - within reason.

"If the cravings really intensify, slice up an apple or slice up an orange and have that," she said. "All your brain wants is something sweet."

People should aim to get in 30 minutes of continuous exercise five times a week, which can be even be split into 15-minute segments, said Jason Gee, fitness director for Toronto-based Personal Fitness Consulting.

"When our trainers go into someone's home, there may not be a lot of room or a lot of equipment but we design our programs around whatever the environment or situation is," he said.

"If they have a flight of stairs, you can definitely do a kind of circuit training-type program where you're walking up and down for 45 seconds," he said. "You can do a variety

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of different push-ups, abs, lunges that require no exercise equipment at all."

For those wanting to stay warm, Gee recommends hopping on a treadmill or walking around the mall. Alternatively, if you're taking transit, head on foot to the next stop, or park your car a bit further away in the lot to add extra steps, Gee said.

Joseph Valtellini, a trainer with Personal Fitness Consulting, said business usually picks up after January with those wanting to stick to New Year's resolutions to lose weight or wanting to work out at home.

"Once they've found they've put on weight they're more motivated, so usually I would increase the intensity of our exercises and maybe give them less rest periods or make them more active for the hour we're together," he said, citing increasing time devoted to cardio as an example.

Gee recommends that individuals who want to shed pounds focus on short-term goals.

"Try to really adapt, write down what you're eating, write down your exercise when you're exercising and then re-test yourself in one or two months," he said.

"When they see progress, it gives them motivation to continue on, and I think that's a healthy long-term way to get results."

Research suggests those trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle should focus on walking around 10,000 steps a

day, Finegood said. But if you're only in the 3,000 or 4,000-step range now, try to insert about 1,000 to 2,000 steps to your routine. When they're consistently integrated, then set a new goal, she added.

"That once a day or once a month treat isn't what is responsible for our (being) significantly overweight, or obesity," Finegood said.

"It's really all about what we do every day, and if we want to change our behaviour every day, we have to do it in ways which we find a sustainable behaviour change - things that become second nature to us."

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