

health+body

Must-read news and expert advice to help protect the body you love

The Truth About Winter Weight Gain

It's not just what you're eating; research shows your body wants you to gain weight this time of year. So how can you outsmart it?

The eggnog, the pecan pie, the fast food at the airport—holiday splurges aren't the only reason many women put on a few pounds every winter. "Your body regulates hormones and fat storage differently in winter than during spring or summer," says Sasson E. Moulavi, M.D. (a.k.a. Dr. Sass), the medical director of Smart for Life Weight Management Centers in Boca Raton, Florida. Here, how your biology can conspire against you, and how to fight back.



You're over-stressed.

"Due to everything from holiday demands to the weather's effect on your commute, winter months often come with more stress," says Ramani Durvasula, Ph.D., a neuropsychology researcher at California State University, Los Angeles. The longer you have high levels of the stress hormone cortisol, the more it can exert its nasty effects—increased appetite and stubborn belly fat, says Durvasula. **Your fix:** Eight hours of sleep and regular workouts will help keep levels steady.

You have more cravings.

Levels of serotonin, a brain chemical that regulates appetite and



mood, may drop in winter, and that can trigger cravings, especially for carbs. **Your fix:** A full-spectrum lightbulb, believe it or not, since the darkness of winter may be the reason serotonin levels drop, says Dr. Sass. You can get one for less than \$10, and they can fit in any lamp. To make up for the shorter winter days, turn one on for a couple of hours during the evening to trick your

body into thinking there are longer daylight hours.

It's cold out.

The temperature may do funky things to your levels of the hormone leptin, a weight regulator, one small study found. The result? Your body mistakenly

thinks you're starving and produces appetite-stimulating hormones, so you eat more.

Your fix: "Snack on protein-rich foods like almonds, or have a cup of fiber-rich oatmeal for breakfast to keep leptin on the level," advises Durvasula.

And if you do gain weight, she notes, don't despair: "Many women naturally shed their winter pounds when they revert to their warm-weather ways."

—Gina Roberts-Grey

HEALTH ANSWERS, PLEASE!

FROM JOANN E. MANSON, M.D.



IS YOUR BACK SCREAMING?
Get it checked out by an M.D.

I'm only 21, but I have awful back pains. Is it how I sleep or sit? —E.F., NEW YORK CITY

I doubt it. Poor ergonomics rarely cause severe pain in someone your age, and when they do, it tends to hurt mainly when you lie or sit in that position. If there are no other symptoms, such as a fever, it's probably a sprained muscle. You may have injured yourself, even if you don't remember doing so. Treatment may call for just acetaminophen and rest, but I still want you to see a doctor.

Got a Q of your own? E-mail Dr. Manson at healthhelp@glamour.com.

Why? I'm pretty healthy....

Women need to take mysterious back pain seriously, since intense pain could be pelvic inflammatory disease, infection of the fallopian tube or uterus, endometriosis or a ruptured ovarian cyst. If the pain is new and severe, and you are experiencing light-headedness or fever, go for help ASAP.



Glamour contributing editor JoAnn E. Manson, M.D., is chief of the division of preventive medicine at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital, a professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and a lead researcher on several women's health studies.

Eat...more!

♦♦ YOU CAN HAVE THIS

A 4-oz. filet mignon and 2/3 cup creamed spinach
551 calories,
34 grams fat

OR ALL THIS ♦♦

A 4-oz. filet mignon,
1/2 cup mashed potatoes made with butter and whole milk, 1 cup spinach sautéed in olive oil, plus 1 cup apple crisp
540 calories,
24 grams fat

SO REMEMBER: Creamy sides can be the downfall of your steak dinner; look for steamed or sautéed options and you can get an extra side, plus dessert! —Marissa Lippert, R.D.

health quickie Cash is king! People are more likely to buy unhealthy foods when they pay with credit or debit

TOP LEFT: PATRIC SHAW; EAT MORE: JONNY VALIANT; FOOD STYLING: MAGGIE RUGGIERO; PROP STYLING: MELISSA FELDMAN/STROLL PRODUCTIONS; TOP RIGHT: MARK ANDERSON/GETTY IMAGES; MANSON: HEATH ROBBINS; HEALTH QUICKIE: JOURNAL OF CONSUMER RESEARCH, 2010