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## Goodbye holiday weight, hello healthy habits

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THE holidays are often a time for indulgence when counting calories takes a back seat. As a result, the scales often show a few extra kilos when the New Year comes around. Fortunately, a few simple habits can help you get back on track.



A little kilo here, a little kilo there... On average, people put on between 0.4 and 1kg every year, and the holidays certainly don't help.

Researchers at Loughborough University estimate that this festive period can make us gain up to 0.9 kg.

This may seem insignificant, but over 10 years, these small gains are enough to tip many of us into being overweight or even obese.

It's a well-known fact that, to lose weight, you either need to eat less or move more. But in concrete terms, how many calories do you need to cut from your daily intake to achieve this? Less than is commonly imagined, as Alexandra Cremona, a professor at the University of Limerick, explains in an article published on 'The Conversation'.

To create a calorie deficit, it's important to determine your total daily energy expenditure (TDEE).

This takes into account your basal metabolic rate (BMR), which corresponds to the calories required to maintain vital functions at rest, as well as the calories burnt through physical activity. Reducing your calorie intake by 500 to 1,000 calories a day can result in a loss of around 0.5 kg a week. However, several studies indicate that a more moderate deficit of 100 to 200 calories a day can also promote lasting weight loss.

So it's perfectly possible to change your diet gradually, without having to restrict yourself drastically.

### SLOWLY BUT SURELY

But the human body is more than just a calorie machine.

When faced with caloric restriction, it adapts by slowing its basal metabolic rate, a mechanism known as adaptive thermogenesis.

This biological response, designed to conserve energy, can lead to a plateau in weight loss, despite sustained efforts.

Hormones also play a key role in this process. Leptin, responsible for regulating satiety, decreases when food is restricted, while ghrelin, the hunger hormone, increases, making it harder to manage cravings.

In addition, hormonal fluctuations, such as a drop in thyroid hormones or a rise in cortisol, can slow down weight loss and, paradoxically, encourage fat storage.

Fortunately, it is possible to limit the body's adaptive mechanisms. One key is to preserve muscle mass through resistance training and a protein-rich diet, since muscles consume more calories at rest than fat tissue.

Another option is to gradually reduce calorie intake (by 200 to 300 calories a day), while favouring fibre — and protein-rich foods and eating meals on a regular schedule. This approach stabilises both appetite and metabolism.

For those who prefer not to count calories, there are several simple alternatives, such as portion control, choosing lower-calorie foods, drinking more water to promote fullness, or experimenting with intermittent fasting.

Intermittent fasting consists of limiting meals to specific times, enabling the body to better manage its energy intake.

Plus, according to Cremona, longterm behavioural changes can promote weight loss.

“Successful strategies include regular physical activity, continued mindful eating and periodically being diligent about your weight and food intake.

“Having a support system to help you stay on track can also play a big role in helping you maintain weight loss,” she explains in her article on ‘The Conversation’.

So there's no need to turn your diet upside down to shed the kilos gained over the holidays. It's better to make gradual adjustments to help maintain your efforts over the long term, and avoid the yoyo effect while getting back into shape.