

The natural way to ward off **winter weight**

How to make it straight through to spring without gaining a single pound.

By Kate Ashford
Photography by
Stephanie Rausser

Take a walk on the bright side:

Get at least 15 minutes of sunlight a day to help keep your mood up—and cravings down.



The weather's getting cooler, the days are getting shorter. Thinking about grabbing your baggy sweaters to hide a few extra winter pounds you suspect are on the way? Not this year.

Granted, there are scientific reasons why we tend to gain this time of year. "It's possible that prewinter weight gain is genetically programmed to some extent, as it would have had survival value," says Lawrence Cheskin, MD, director of the Johns Hopkins Weight Management Center. Some flab may have helped our ancestors live through long winters. "In preindustrial society, it took more fat in your system to survive a winter when you were working outdoors," adds William Whit, PhD, author of *Food and Society: A Sociological Approach*.

Of course, our 21st-century lifestyles (desk jobs, drive-throughs) no longer require extra pounds. To help you keep weight off, we've found strategies that target the real reasons for winter gain. Ahead, five secrets for keeping your summertime body year-round.

No-gain strategy

#1

Soak up some sun

Lack of sunlight can trigger a drop in the feel-good brain chemical serotonin, leading to depression—and cravings. People whose moods dip in winter use serotonin faster and try to make up for the deficit in other ways, chiefly by scarfing down carbs, according to a study published in *Neuropsychopharmacology*. "Your brain must have serotonin, and your body makes it after you eat carbohydrates (with little or no protein)," says Judith Wurtman, PhD, a research scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and co-author of *The Serotonin Power Diet*. Avoid carb binges by getting as much natural light as possible; you'll get benefits even if it's overcast. Drink your morning cup of coffee outside, work by a window (if you can), and take at least 15 minutes to walk on your lunch break. A well-lit home and office can help, too: Add cool fluorescent lights, the type used in therapeutic light boxes.



Go ahead, give in: Avoid binges by eating some healthy carbs late in the day.

No-gain strategy

#2

Don't cut out carbs

To make sure your serotonin level doesn't drop low enough to trigger an all-out binge, you'll want to eat some carbs. Save them for late afternoon and early evening, when serotonin dips and cravings tend to start. "By 4 o'clock, give in to what your brain demands," Wurtman says. "Have pasta, bread, and starchy vegetables like baked potatoes, corn, squash." In other words, carefully time your carbohydrate attack, and eat the good-for-you complex carbs that are low in processed junk. (For tips on lightening your favorite carb-heavy dishes, see "Can't Quit Comfort Foods?" on page 129.)



No-gain
strategy
#3

Get friendly with winter squash

You may have enjoyed luscious farmstand tomatoes all summer, but now their grocery-store counterparts look pale and feel like mini-medicine balls. Maybe that's why one study in *Public Health Nutrition* found that people consume fewer fruit and salad vegetables during the colder months. But the produce that's naturally in season in winter is your secret weapon for keeping off the pounds: People who ate the most dark-green and orange fruits and veggies lost the most weight in six months, according to Brazilian researchers. Hello, broccoli, carrots, kale, oranges, spinach, sweet potatoes, Swiss chard, winter squash! They're all delicious this time of year—so toss them in your cart.

Want more?
Get tasty recipes for slimming green and orange veggies at Health.com/winter-weight.
Health.com



A picture is worth ...
a gain-free winter. Take snapshots of everything you eat to keep extra pounds at bay.

Move more indoors

A Michigan State University (MSU) study found that people who are active outdoors in spring and summer working in their gardens, for instance, drop that activity when the weather changes. "And they don't make up for it," says researcher James Pivarnik, professor of kinesiology and epidemiology at MSU. So even if you're eating the same amount of food as you did in July, you're not moving around as much, leading the scale to inch up. Find an indoor activity you love so much that you'll do it often. We like the Nintendo Wii Fit (shown above): You can perfect your virtual ski jump or hula hooping form and more—all while burning those cold-weather calories.

No-gain strategy

#4



No-gain strategy

#5

Photograph your food

People eat nearly 90 more calories a day heading into the winter months than they do in the spring, according to research from the University of Massachusetts Medical School. One recent study found that by tracking calories with a food journal you can double your weight loss. But who has time to write down everything she eats? Solution: Put your camera phone to good use, and snap a quick shot of all your meals and snacks (yes, even the little nibbles). Then download the photos to your computer, and print them to make a journal or compile them online with a service like www.myfoodphone.com or www.nutrax.com, where they'll calculate your calories for a small fee. It's a tiny price to pay for a healthier winter body. ●

Can't quit comfort foods? Use these tips to lighten up your favorites.

Lighter, luscious mashed potatoes. Choose Yukon Gold potatoes for their buttery flavor. And use low-fat buttermilk to get the health benefits of low-fat milk and a tangy kick, too.

Delicious and healthy mac-and-cheese. Use 1% low-fat milk instead of whole and just 6 ounces of cheese. For a tasty, low-fat crust, top your mac and cheese with breadcrumbs.

Better-for-you brownies. Start with your favorite brownie mix, and cut the oil down to 2 tablespoons. Make up for lost moisture by adding 1 tablespoon of chopped dates, which

actually make the brownies fudgier. Bake in an 11- by 7-inch pan, and cut the brownies into smaller squares. (Aim for 20 or 24 brownies, instead of 16.)

—FRANCES A. LARGEMAN-ROTH, RD