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Scuba Fitness: Healthy holiday eating tips for scuba divers



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Think before you indulge. Holiday celebrations are not an excuse to dive in with abandon. Even one high fat meal can cause dramatic increases in blood pressure and increase cardiorespiratory stress associated with both physical and mental tasks, which contribute to heart disease over time. The caloric content of a traditional Thanksgiving meal is estimated between 3,000 and 7,000 calories. The resulting high blood lipid levels, high blood sugar levels, and high blood alcohol content may take from three to 10 hours for

the body to metabolize. Give your body time to metabolize any over-indulgences before diving. Avoid eating high fat and high sugar foods at the same time. Even when eating below daily caloric needs, the stress of this combination on your body leads to high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease and obesity. Considering these are the most frequently reported medical conditions by divers, think before you eat on Thanksgiving Day.

Choose smaller portions. Reduce portions to one-fourth cup (about the size of the round face of your dive computer). By the time you select mashed potatoes, stuffing, yams, rolls, butter, turkey, ham, gravy, green beans and cranberry, you will be eating three cups of food. Most portions are easily double or triple this size in addition to alcoholic beverages and desserts. Most Americans over eat everyday and during the holidays are likely to gain an

average of a pound per week. This weight gain is often around the waist, hips and buttocks distorting efficient contours for streamlined movement, increasing drag and requiring more effort by the diver. Studies have also shown greater potential for more vertical and dangerous ascent rates with larger buoyancy compensation devices, more likely to be worn by a larger diver. Higher body fat percentages are also considered a factor for higher risk of decompression sickness.

Exercise before you eat. Go for a walk, join in the family flag football game, or hit the gym early in the day. Cardiorespiratory fitness is the highest priority for divers. Recent studies indicate exercising at a comfortable pace for as little as 45 minutes counteracts the negative effects of a high fat meal and actually improves artery function. Further, when exercise is combined with low fat meals, artery function is improved beyond what it was before the meal for a net positive healthy result.

Prepare and bring healthy food. Switching from saturated butter and fats to unsaturated oils is a significant improvement toward a healthy lifestyle. Saturated fats will decrease your HDL (good) cholesterol while unsaturated fats actually may increase your HDL (good) cholesterol. There are many “cooking light” recipes for traditional holiday dishes. If your meal is potluck, prepare and bring a healthy dish. Fresh green salads, wild and brown rice, steamed vegetables and fruit salads are all healthy options. Spend no more than one dive (about an hour) eating your main meal and take a surface interval (of several hours) before dessert. Select one dessert. Avoid snacking during the hours between. If you must, eat from the veggie tray (avoid the cream cheese dips - try the salsa).

Eat the plan. Just like your dive planning and training, safekeeping your body during the holidays includes looking out for yourself and your dinner buddy by preparing in advance, applying what you know and making good decisions. Surround yourself with others who have similar health and fitness goals or decide in advance as a family or group of friends to practice healthy holiday habits.