As we come off our sugar high from Halloween, we rush headlong into one of the most treacherous food seasons of the year. Thanksgiving, Chanukah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and New Year’s Day can all spell trouble for people who like to eat. They don’t have to, however. By applying strategies that our more fit and healthful counterparts use, we can make it through every season of the year without gaining weight.

**Strategy #1.** Eat breakfast. Eating breakfast gives us a chance to fuel up for the day and get all of our hormonal levels off to an even start. We have more time to burn off the calories we consume and we tend to feel more satisfied throughout the day.

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**Strategy #7.** Use a smaller plate. Our eyes really are bigger than our bellies (at least until we stretch them out with too much food). When looking at a larger plate, bowl, or beverage container, our eyes tend to communicate to our brains the need to fill up that space with food or drink. Thus, we overindulge. Smaller dishes equate to a greater likelihood that we will feel satisfied with less food in our tummies.

**Strategy #6.** Don’t look at the food. When people sit or stand where they can see the buffet table, they tend to eat more. The sight of food keeps it on our minds and makes us believe we are still hungry when we are not. Getting the food out of sight can also get it out of mind.

**Strategy #5.** Be a less efficient eater. Just as having a larger plate convinces us that we need to fill it up, eating with large utensils makes it easier to shovel food into our mouths. We take in more food with less effort, so we don’t notice as quickly when our stomachs get full. By having to work harder to get the food to our mouths, we are more inclined to slow down and eat less. It also helps to put the fork or spoon down between bites so that we have to use more effort.

**Strategy #4.** Leave food on the plate. Many of us grew up hearing about starving children in remote places in the world, and we were admonished to clean our plates as a way to somehow reduce famine and suffering in the world. However, that logic didn’t make sense then, and it doesn’t make sense now. Allowing ourselves to eat only what we really want, even if it means leaving food behind on our plates, helps insure that we won’t overeat.

**Strategy #3.** Work those jaws! Just as heavier people tend to be more efficient eaters and consume more, they also have a tendency to chew less. The first step in the digestion process is chewing the food well. By consciously slowing down and chewing more, we give ourselves more time to taste our food and enjoy the textures. We also allow our stomachs time to notify our brains that we are full.

**Strategy #2.** Be thoughtful about your eating. Take the time to ponder your choices and make mindful decisions about which food items you really want. Too often, we thoughtlessly pile huge helpings of everything on our plates only to realize a while later that we missed an item that we truly wanted. Look at the options and make prudent decisions. If you only get Great-Aunt Mona’s oyster dressing once a year, but you get mashed potatoes whenever you want them, forego the mashed potatoes.

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Enjoy holiday meals more by carefully choosing your food items and eating them in moderation. This will lead to less worry about gaining weight.
The third Thursday of each November is designated as the Great American Smokeout by the American Cancer Society. This is a day when tobacco users are encouraged to quit using for the day, or to at least come up with a plan for quitting. The use of tobacco products is the single largest preventable cause of disease and premature death (about 440,000 annually according to the Centers for Disease Control) in the United States. Overall mortality among smokers is about three times higher than for people who have never smoked.

If you are thinking about quitting smoking, preparing yourself is an important first step. Getting a sense of when you smoke, how much, and what triggers you will help you create a plan that you are more likely to stick with. For a few days, keep a log of every time you smoke a cigarette: what time, what else you are doing, how you feel, and so forth. You should be able to see a pattern of behaviors emerge. For example, you may start your day with a cup of coffee and a cigarette. You might smoke after each meal. Maybe you only smoke if you are out and have a beer or a mixed drink. Perhaps it is stressful situations that cause you to light up. Once you see your personal patterns and triggers, you can begin to plan how to change your behaviors.

Understand that this will be a hard process. On one hand, you will be working to break an addiction to nicotine. It usually takes about three days for your body to cleanse itself of nicotine residue. In addition, you must work to change your behaviors to adapt to a new tobacco free lifestyle. This can actually be the more challenging part. You will have to relearn how to do some things that you have taken for granted as a smoker. Instead of reaching for a cigarette when you are stressed, you may have to go for a walk or chew gum. Nicotine gum can be helpful for some people because it contains just enough nicotine to take the edge off of their cravings and allow them to gradually decrease their use of it.

It will also be important to thoroughly clean your car, clothes, and living space. Residue from the nicotine can embed itself into fibers and adhere to hard surfaces keeping the smell of the nicotine in your space as a constant reminder to you.

One “advantage” that many smokers tend to have over non-smokers and those who are quitting is that they breathe in very deeply as they smoke. As you quit, make a point of inhaling deeply and often so that you can oxygenate your body.

Using some kind of nicotine replacement product such as gum or patches can make quitting easier. Too often, people insist that they want to quit cold turkey, and then they feel disappointed in themselves if they are unsuccessful. It is common to have slip-ups. As soon as you realize you have fallen off track, make the decision to get back on track. Remember that part of your success is changing the habits that go along with your tobacco use.

Having encouragement and support from friends and family is also essential for your success. It will be important for you to speak candidly about your needs as you prepare for a quit date or while you are in the process of quitting.

There are resources to help you get started and keep you going. You can call the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) to register for a quit coach to help you through the rough times and to get a free two-week starter kit of nicotine patches, gum, or lozenges. You can also visit the website at www.OKhelpline.com. Two other helpful websites are: betobaccofree.gov and smokefree.gov.

Smokefreetxt is a program designed for adults and teens over the age of 13 who have an unlimited texting plan on their mobile phone. If you don’t have unlimited texts, standard rates will apply. The text program will start two weeks before your quit date and last for six weeks following your quit date. There will also be a follow-up text 1 month, 3 months, and 6 months after the end of the program.
Stress refers to the way our bodies react to situations that we feel are too challenging for us or that are out of our control. Often, people associate stress with bad things that happen in life. It is certainly true that major life events that are negative (loss of a job, death of a loved one, and so forth) challenge our ability to problem-solve and cope. However, positive life events may be equally challenging. Buying a new home or getting a promotion at work are both positive events than can be very overwhelming. They stress us as much as the negative events do.

Part of what determines how we will respond to certain life events is the amount of control we perceive we have over the situation. The less control we perceive we have, the higher our stress level tends to be. Holidays can be especially stressful for many people because they don’t perceive that they have choices in what, how, or when they will do things.

Keeping a stress journal can be a good way to begin looking at what kind of situations cause you stress and how you handle the stress. The things you will want to include in the journal are what causes your stress, how you feel physically and emotionally, your behavior in response to the stress, and what you did to feel better. An example might be that your sister seems always to draw unfair and unfavorable comparisons between her children and yours. When she does this, you feel angry and defensive about your children. You raise your voice and accuse family members of favoring her children over yours. You ultimately leave the family gathering and drink wine until you feel better.

Helpguide.org suggests using the Four A’s in coping with stressful situations. Two involve changing the situation and two involve changing your reaction to the situation.

**Change the situation:**

**Avoid the stressor.** If you know that a certain person or situation is stressful for you, set limits on how much you will expose yourself to it. You cannot always completely avoid an annoying person, but you can set limits on how much time you spend with that person. Learn to say “no” and mean it. Be realistic in what you can or should expect from yourself. It isn’t possible to be all things to all people, but we often strive for perfection and infallibility instead of acknowledging that we are human.

**Alter the stressor.** One reason that people will push our buttons is that they find our responses entertaining. Stop responding the way they expect, and they will eventually stop pushing. It is also important to learn how to assert yourself when stressful situations arise or before they do. Rather than wait for your sister to belittle your children at a family gathering, explain to her privately in a calm manner that the way she treats your children is hurtful to you and to them. She may or may not have intended any maliciousness and she may or may not change, but you have now taken control and can effect a different outcome at the next family event.

**Change your reaction:**

**Adapt to the stressor.** We can’t always change what life hands us, but we can change how we respond to it. There are times when we have to shift the question from “Why does this person treat me this way?” to “Why do I care?” That is a huge shift in attitude and takes the focus off of what is “wrong” with you. It is helpful to look at the big picture and not obsess about the moment. Focusing on positive aspects of a situation and backing away from the need to be perfect can also help lessen your stress.

**Accept the stressor.** There are things in life that we simply cannot change. When we accept this, we allow ourselves to be much happier and less stressed. We put a lot of stress on ourselves by trying to control and change people or things that cannot be controlled or changed. Learn to forgive and let go of those things. Find healthy ways to cope with such things (meditate, exercise, draw, etc.) and let them go. We must identify and control the things that we can and let go of all the rest.
Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

To prepare vegetables, place first 6 ingredients in a single layer on a jelly-roll pan coated with cooking spray. Lightly coat vegetable mixture with cooking spray. Sprinkle evenly with 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon black pepper; toss. Bake at 425 degree for one hour or until browned. Transfer vegetable mixture to a large bowl.

To prepare pesto, combine basil leaves and remaining ingredients in a food processor. Process until smooth, scraping sides. Spoon basil mixture over vegetable mixture. Toss to coat.

Per serving:
- 128 calories
- 4.3 grams fat
- 4.3 grams protein
- 20.5 grams carbohydrates
- 5.1 grams fiber
- 2 milligrams cholesterol
- 1.5 milligrams iron
- 277 milligrams sodium
- 101 milligrams calcium

**Maintain! No Gain!**

From November 18 through January 6, OCCC faculty, staff, and students can participate in this healthy challenge to NOT gain weight (with no expectation to lose weight). Weigh-in can be at home or on campus beginning November 18. Last weigh-in will be January 6. There will be weekly reminders and inspiration for all. Plan to join us!