

# HOLIDAY HEALTH CHALLENGE 2021

## WEEK 1



**YMCA of Greater Westfield**  
67 Court Street, Westfield, MA  
[westfieldymca.org](http://westfieldymca.org) | 413-568-8631

Hello Holiday Health Challenge participants!

Congratulations on choosing to give yourself the gift of good health this holiday season! We hope to help you enjoy this time, while still staying on track with your health.

### **A few quick housekeeping details...**

- If maintaining your weight, make sure you weigh yourself for the week. The best time to do so is first thing in the morning
- If increasing your activity, set your baseline that you need to beat
- If improving your well-being, rate yourself on the scale provided

**This first week's (11/22-11/28) themes are going to be the following:**

### ***MAINTAINING WEIGHT***

Watching portions ... with Thanksgiving and all the wonderful foods we have that day (and days following), watching portions will be important in maintaining your weight. Attached is a sheet with tips to help you do that, and a sheet with some sample Thanksgiving/holiday fare, how many calories each has, and most importantly, *how long it would take to burn that off*. The intent is awareness.

### ***INCREASING MOVEMENT***

Incorporating short walks ... you are encouraged to add a short walk (or walks) to your daily routine. The handout spells out some of the benefits of walking. Please note that each week's movement suggestion is just that - a suggestion. If you have a preferred way of increasing your activity level, absolutely do that instead!

### ***IMPROVING WELL-BEING***

Actively focusing on gratitude...yes, we often do that as we give thanks on Thanksgiving. But we want you to write down an expression of gratitude every day this week - and keep that list in sight as you add to it daily.

### ***BONUS CHALLENGE***

Add an active outdoor activity. Hiking, yard work, a long walk...whatever works for you! Let your team leader know what you do.

Your team leader will be reaching out to you this week to touch base with you and see how things are going.

Happy, healthy holidays!

Michelle



**Dissatisfied:** I am unhappy with my overall well-being in two or more of the following areas- mental health, energy levels, productivity, motivation, quality of sleep.



**Somewhat Dissatisfied:** I am unhappy with my overall well-being in one of the following areas- mental health, energy levels, productivity, motivation, quality of sleep.



**Neutral:** I feel indifferent about my overall well-being in any of the following areas- mental health, energy levels, productivity, motivation, quality of sleep.



**Somewhat Satisfied:** I am happy with my overall well-being in one of the following areas- mental health, energy levels, productivity, motivation, quality of sleep.



**Satisfied:** I am happy with my overall well-being in two or more of the following areas- mental health, energy levels, productivity, motivation, quality of sleep.

# 5 surprising benefits of walking



The next time you have a check-up, don't be surprised if your doctor hands you a prescription to walk. Yes, this simple activity that you've been doing since you were about a year old is now being touted as "the closest thing we have to a wonder drug," in the words of Dr. Thomas Frieden, former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Of course, you probably know that any physical activity, including walking, is a boon to your overall health. But walking in particular comes with a host of benefits.

Here's a list of five that may surprise you.

**1. It counteracts the effects of weight-promoting genes.** Harvard researchers looked at 32 obesity-promoting genes in over 12,000 people to determine how much these genes actually contribute to body weight. They then discovered that, among the study participants who walked briskly for about an hour a day, the effects of those genes were cut in half.

**2. It helps tame a sweet tooth.** A pair of studies from the University of Exeter found that a 15-minute walk can curb cravings for chocolate and even reduce the amount of chocolate you eat in stressful situations. And the latest research confirms that walking can reduce cravings and intake of a variety of sugary snacks.

**3. It reduces the risk of developing breast cancer.** Researchers already know that any kind of physical activity blunts the risk of breast cancer. But an American Cancer Society study that zeroed in on walking found that women who walked seven or more hours a week had a 14% lower risk of breast cancer than those who walked three hours or fewer per week. And walking provided this protection even for the women with breast cancer risk factors, such as being overweight or using supplemental hormones.

**4. It eases joint pain.** Several studies have found that walking reduces arthritis-related pain, and that walking five to six miles a week can even prevent arthritis from forming in the first place. Walking protects the joints — especially the knees and hips, which are most susceptible to osteoarthritis — by lubricating them and strengthening the muscles that support them.

**5. It boosts immune function.** Walking can help protect you during cold and flu season. A study of over 1,000 men and women found that those who walked at least 20 minutes a day, at least 5 days a week, had 43% fewer sick days than those who exercised once a week or less. And if they did get sick, it was for a shorter duration, and their symptoms were milder.

# SAMPLE FOOD CALORIES & CALORIE BURN

**It's all about awareness!**  
**Think about the mindless eating you do.**  
**How many calories do YOU burn during a workout?**

(Calorie burn based on a 35 year old female who is 5'7" tall and weighs 144 lbs.)

Slice of pumpkin pie (316 cal.) + dollop whipped cream (103 cal.)

Calorie burn time:

Swim: 31 min   Jog: 43 min   Cycle: 57 min   Walk: 104 min

7 oz red wine (174 cal.) + 4 crackers w/cheese (198 cal.)

Calorie burn time:

Swim: 35 min   Jog: 48 min   Cycle: 64 min   Walk: 127 min

8 oz. eggnog (343 cal.) + 1 gingerbread cookie (140 cal.)

Calorie burn time:

Swim: 41 min   Jog: 55 min   Cycle: 74 min   Walk: 135 min

1 cup stuffing (356 cal) + 4 oz. canned gravy (58 cal.)

Calorie burn time:

Swim: 35 min   Jog: 47 min   Cycle: 63 min   Walk: 115 min

For more examples, go to: <https://www.calorieking.com/us/en/foods/>

# WATCHING PORTIONS

## Don't Eat Straight From The Bag

Be conscious about not eating snacks directly from the big bag or jar. Instead, portion them out in a bowl, dish, or snack baggie. Regardless of what you're eating, exactly—potato chips, pretzels, nuts, and the like—you'll have a more visual representation about how much you're eating overall, which should ultimately lead you to eat less than if you were taking handfuls from the bag.

## Keep An Eye On Condiments

Be aware of how heavy-handed you are when you're using condiments. Try drizzling dressing on your salad, not drowning and not using your veggie or chip as a 'spoon' for dips or hummus. You can quickly cut back on calories while still enjoying the taste of your favorite condiments.

## Check Your Coffee Order

Sure, it's fine to add a little milk and sugar to cut the taste of your black coffee. If you can avoid the fancy drinks and added sugars or creams when you're doing your daily Starbucks order, it'll help you unconsciously cut down on your calories while still allowing you to enjoy that boost of caffeine. If you're looking for alternatives to your usual order, try adding creamy oat milk and Stevia to your mug instead.

## Don't Skip Dessert (Really!)

There's no need for you to be skipping out on dessert entirely because you're trying to lose weight. The key is to be mindful when you are eating those desserts, specifically by monitoring your portion. Choose your sweet, but then just don't overdo it. Consciously give yourself the right to eat it, make room for it, and then move on. Have a piece of chocolate, a scoop of ice cream, a bowl of Cool Whip and berries, but then try not to go back for more which, in turn, would increase your caloric intake.

## Be Beverage-Conscious

Another area in which you can be calorie *conscious* (as opposed to a calorie *counter*) is by taking a look at what you drink. Ask yourself the following: Are you ordering a large (as opposed to a medium or small) when you hit the drive-thru? Are you getting drinks with tons of sugar syrups and whipped cream? Are you ordering sweetened beverages? If so, you may want to rethink your go-to while trying to lose weight, opting instead for unsweetened teas or sugar-free seltzers.

## Eat Protein First Thing

Pro tip: Having a big dose of protein at breakfast is a hack for weight loss without counting calories. There is a lot of research that suggests higher protein intake overall helps people with muscle building and satiation. Try to aim for 30 grams of protein at a minimum for breakfast. Protein smoothie, eggs, Greek yogurt!

## Try To Get Plenty Of Sleep

You want to make sure you're getting a good quality and quantity of sleep each night. Why? Poor sleep will actually increase your cravings the next day, making you more inclined to want foods that are higher in sugar and carbohydrates, since those nutrients act as quick energy for the body (which is what your body craves when you're sleep deprived.)



## 7 Scientifically Proven Benefits of Gratitude

You'll be grateful that you made the change (and you'll sleep better).

Posted April 3, 2015 | [Reviewed by Ekua Hagan](#)

"Stop feeling sorry for yourself," we are often told. And while it can be hard to avoid self-pity entirely, mentally strong people choose to *exchange* self-pity for [gratitude](#). Whether you choose to write a few sentences in a gratitude journal or simply take a moment to silently acknowledge all that you have, giving thanks can transform your life.

Here are 7 scientifically proven benefits:

**Gratitude opens the door to more relationships.** Not only does saying "thank you" constitute good manners, but showing appreciation can help you win new friends, according to a 2014 study published in *Emotion*. The study found that thanking a new acquaintance makes them more likely to seek an ongoing relationship. So whether you thank a stranger for holding the door or send a thank-you note to that colleague who helped you with a project, acknowledging other people's contributions can lead to new opportunities.

**Gratitude improves physical health.** Grateful people experience fewer aches and pains and report feeling healthier than other people, according to a 2012 study published in *Personality and Individual Differences*. Not surprisingly, grateful people are also more likely to take care of their health. They exercise more often and are more likely to attend regular check-ups, which is likely to contribute to further longevity.

**Gratitude improves psychological health.** Gratitude reduces a multitude of toxic emotions, from [envy](#) and resentment to frustration and regret. Robert Emmons, a leading gratitude researcher, has conducted multiple studies on the link between gratitude and well-being. His research confirms that gratitude effectively increases [happiness](#) and reduces [depression](#).

**Gratitude enhances [empathy](#) and reduces [aggression](#).** Grateful people are more likely to behave in a pro-social manner, even when others behave less kindly, according to a 2012 study by the University of Kentucky. Study participants who ranked higher on gratitude scales were less likely to retaliate against others, even when given negative feedback. They experienced more sensitivity and empathy toward other people and a decreased desire to seek [revenge](#).

**Grateful people sleep better.** Writing in a gratitude journal improves sleep, according to a 2011 study published in *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*. Spend just 15 minutes jotting down a few grateful sentiments before bed, and you may sleep better and longer.

**Gratitude improves [self-esteem](#).** A 2014 study published in the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* found that gratitude increased athletes' self-esteem, an essential component to optimal performance. Other studies have shown that gratitude reduces social comparisons. Rather than becoming resentful toward people who have more money or better jobs—a major factor in reduced self-esteem—grateful people are able to appreciate other people's accomplishments.

**Gratitude increases mental strength.** For years, research has shown gratitude not only reduces [stress](#), but it may also play a major role in overcoming trauma. A 2006 study published in *Behavior Research and Therapy* found that Vietnam War veterans with higher levels of gratitude experienced lower rates of post-[traumatic](#) stress disorder. A 2003 study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that gratitude was a major contributor to [resilience](#) following the terrorist attacks on September 11. Recognizing all that you have to be thankful for—even during the worst times—fosters resilience.

We all have the ability and opportunity to cultivate gratitude. Rather than complain about the things you think you deserve, take a few moments to focus on all that you *have*. Developing an "attitude of gratitude" is one of the simplest ways to improve your satisfaction with life.