Weight gain at holidays not horrible for athletes

By Amanda MacMilian, Outside

Enjoy that fruitcake. There’s nothing wrong with athletes gaining a few pounds over the holidays. In fact, for someone like a runner who’s been competing at race weight, it’s healthy to bulk up a bit during off-season.

“This can be a great time to work on your strength and your endurance by really feeding yourself well and giving your body a little extra fuel,” says Jim White, registered dietician and spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and certified personal trainer. “It’s hard to maintain a super clean diet during the holidays, and taking a break from it will give you both a physical and mental breather.”

It’s possible to compromise your immunity if you’ve been restricting calories and therefore restricting nutrients needed for your body to operate optimally, White says. Adding a few extra pounds can help your body better defend against stress, the demands of exercise, and cold and flu germs.

The catch? You’ve still have to be smart about what you’re eating—and not overdo it. In other words, enjoy that slice of fruitcake, but don’t eat the whole pie in one day. “Whether training or not, you should never aim to eat a lot of desserts or rich holiday food,” says Alicia Shay, a nutritionist and professional runner. “Too much indulgence will leave you feeling heavy and crummy when training resumes.”

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