

# Healthy Habits Keep Your Weight in Check

By Peggy Werner

As summer fades and the holidays approach, it's time to be proactive and make sure celebrations don't include gaining weight.

"With Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and other celebrations, food is always the focus and at a time when people are more sedentary," says Dr. Michael Hernandez, head of the Healthy Living Program at Fox Valley Orthopedics in Elgin. "For those who want to control their weight, it's a very difficult time."

Hernandez has several suggestions to help people think strategically and avoid the pitfalls of overeating.

Start by thinking about where you are going, what food will be served and what you will eat. Drink a big glass of water about 30 minutes before going out, so you'll feel more full. Try to avoid standing by tables of food, because it's so easy to reach out and grab something. Those small bites add up to big calories.

When asked to bring a dish, think green and crispy, Hernandez adds. Cucumbers, peppers, celery, lettuce and other vegetables will fill you up and leave you feeling more satisfied than if you ate something crunchy. Avoid creamy toppings and sauces. Choose instead salsa, crumbled cheese and avocado. Share healthy recipes to keep yourself and others inspired to eat healthy. Keep your focus on people and conversation rather than food. Have a small meal before going to a celebration.

Hernandez leads Fox Valley Orthopedics' Healthy Living Program, which was founded a year ago for people who need

to lose weight before orthopedic surgery. It's a medically supervised weight management program built on compassion, commitment, education and support, and it's personalized to an individual's medical history and conditions. Participants learn how to build new habits, make food modifications and exercise daily, and they examine whether weight-loss medications are right for them.



Dr. Michael Hernandez



Diet, exercise and attention to other health factors can play a big role in maintaining a healthy weight. For those who need a little help, Fox Valley Orthopedics now offers a specialized program that helps people to lose weight with better habits.

The program lasts at least three months, through a period where a team of health care experts help participants through a fitness app, dietary changes, discussing the importance of sleep, and coping to reduce stress, anxiety and depression.

Obesity is an epidemic in America, a condition that affects an estimated 72% of the population, Hernandez says. But thanks to initiatives like the Healthy Living Program, it's a concern that's gaining attention. Hernandez currently sees patients at Fox Valley Orthopedics' Elgin location and will also see patients in Geneva this fall.

"It's very complex, but the solutions are there," Hernandez says. "People just have to make the decision that they are going to do something, and then follow a plan and get the support and education they need."

The results are truly life-changing, when people learn to embrace healthy habits, exercise and additional strategies.

"It's amazing what happens when people change their lifestyle and discover how much better they feel," says Hernandez. "I love what I do. It's very rewarding."

*Fox Valley Orthopedics has locations in Algonquin, Barrington, Elgin, Geneva and Yorkville. Call (630) 584-1400 to schedule an appointment. ■*