Experts Share Their Best Tips on How to Avoid Vacation Weight Gain

It's possible to enjoy yourself while away — without having to reach for your comfy pants the minute you get home

By **Stephanie Emma Pfeffer** | June 06, 2019 02:57 PM

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Summer is here, and for many people that means ditching real-life responsibilities for a well-deserved vacation. But with all that eating, relaxing and otherwise indulging, it can be hard to come back looking and feeling as trim as when you left. Below, experts give their best tips on how to avoid packing on too many pounds — even when lounging to the max.

Before you leave

Smart habits start on the way to your destination, says Parker Cote, personal trainer and fitness model who has traveled to more than 30 cities for shoots. "Once you cross through airport security, you don't know what you're getting into. Food options are out of your control." That's why Cote likes to pack non-perishable snacks like nuts, protein bars or low-sodium jerky. The key is having access to healthy choices so you don't feel tempted to stop at a kiosk full of processed sandwiches, he says.

Drink a lot of water. "When I fly, I make sure to buy a liter of water after I pass through security and finish it before I land," says the Boston-based Cote. This helps combat dehydration from flying while helping you avoid

caffeine and alcohol. (You *are* avoiding them on the flight, right?)

Skip all in-flight foods if you can, especially meals included on long hauls. "The food is so sodium-rich that you end up feeling bloated and uncomfortable," he says. "That's no way to start off a trip." Same with the other salty, crunchy snacks — those freebies won't leave you feeling energized for your adventure. Again, this is when having a piece of fruit or your own homemade trail mix can come in handy.

When you arrive

Set up good habits the first day. "It's what I call the push-off method," says Ilana Muhlstein, M.S. R.D.N., who explains the importance of pacing yourself, especially if your trip if four days or longer. "Start with a solid, lean day to set the tone of the trip — then add one special thing, like a glass of wine or a delicious plate of pasta — each day that follows." Push treats off so they stay special, she says. "They're not going anywhere."

Along the same lines, begin each day with a protein-packed breakfast, says the L.A.-based Muhlstein. "On vacation the temptations accelerate throughout the day," she explains. "You're going to want a cocktail at lunch, gelato after dinner, the special cuisine wherever you are. Don't start it first-thing in the morning." That means avoiding sugary treats like waffles, pancakes, muffins and danishes in favor of a veggie omelet with a side of whole-grain toast or berries.

Get moving. "Don't worry about doing some perfect workout plan — you want to enjoy yourself on vacation," says Cote. "Just be as active as possible." Walk to explore the area instead of relying on public transportation (as long as it's safe). If you're at the beach, take a surfing lesson or rent a kayak. If there's a pool, go for a swim. "Do things that are fun, that get you outside," Cote says. "Find activities to offset the indulgences that you are naturally going to partake in." If you prefer to keep up with your regular workouts, pack Cote's go-to travel tool: a single exercise band. "It's versatile, takes up no room in your luggage, weighs nothing and you can do it anywhere," he says.

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Throughout the trip

Try not to eat out three meals a day. Make a quick run to the grocery store to stock up on a few healthy choices to keep in your room so you don't order a burger and fries for lunch — again. "Restaurant dishes hide butter and salt in spots you don't expect, which can rack up calories without you even realizing," says Cote. "When you buy your own food, you know what's in it and have more control over what you're eating." Of course that doesn't mean foregoing signature dishes or the area's special cuisine. Definitely eat the steak frites in Paris or the conch fritters in the Bahamas. Just make good choices, says Cote. "Make the indulgences worth it!" (That might mean

rethinking the ten poolside pina coladas.)

On that note, beware the snack shack by the pool. "If you are at a beach resort and you just sit by the pool and eat fried food and drinks upon drinks, it can get really excessive and you just feel lethargic and bad," says Cote. Go for a long walk or rent a bike and explore the city before having drinks. "Fitness should enhance the quality of your life, not take away from it — especially on vacation," he says.

Muhlstein also suggests bringing a large reusable water bottle — at least 24 to 32 ounces — to accomplish what she calls "3 by 3": "Drinking three bottles of water by 3pm can help minimize weight gain by helping you feel full, while also preventing dehydration."

And don't stay up late partying. "Get on a sleep schedule," says Muhlstein. "When we sleep less than seven hours a night we have higher levels of the hunger hormone and, lower levels of the satisfying hormone," she says.

When you return

Believe it or not, you should get right back on the scale. "I always tell my clients: You can lose weight as fast as you can gain it," Muhlstein says. "If you come back and the scale is up 6 lbs. or 8 lbs. you can always lose it by making the next week about more water, more veggies, more home-cooked food, less restaurant food and less alcohol," she says. Getting back into your normal food and sleep routines will help shed the bloat from salt, grease and booze.