

How to Avoid Gaining Weight Over the Holidays

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VENUS INDEX
REPORTS

by John Barban
and Brad Howard

Brad Howard: Welcome once again to your Venus Index podcast. Today we're going to give you some strategies to not only help you enjoy the holiday seasons, but to help you maintain or actually increase your progress without feeling bad about the whole situation. We know you are going to have family, friends, events, all these things that are going to be tugging at you. And yes, you've got a responsibility to go to these things. I mean, you don't want to be a hermit, so what we're going to talk about some of the strategies, and actually the mindsets that we use on a day-to-day basis that are going to help you out. So John, I know you wanted to talk about Thanksgiving so let's go ahead and start up with that.

John Barban: Okay, Thanksgiving as an example, but any holiday is the same. Christmas is just right behind it and anything else that you celebrate. So we were talking in the forums about what to do to get through Thanksgiving weekend without really gaining weight, and the simple solution I think is to literally prepare for that weekend by eating lower calories or eating some kind of caloric deficit for however many days it takes beforehand, two days, three days, one day, to create enough of a deficit such that on Thanksgiving Day when you're going to have your big meal, you don't have to really think about how many calories you're consuming and just sort of go with it and come out on the other end of that weekend neutral, you're not going to gain weight, you're not going to lose weight. You will just be where you were at the beginning of the week.

If you know yourself and you know you can actually overeat by 2,000 calories on Thanksgiving Day (and that doesn't mean 2,000 calories for the

day. I mean 2,000 calories above how much you burn up, so above your BMR); which is not unheard of, like for a lot of women that's probably only 3,500 total calories, and that's very doable. So if you know that that's the type of day you want and you want to have two helpings of dessert, and you just don't want to think about it and you really don't want to have any guilt. The simplest way is to budget for that, so I would suggest take the four days before Thanksgiving and try to create a 500-calorie deficit for those four days, which isn't that bad really. I mean, that's like your workout, let's say, a couple of hundred plus 300-calorie deficit from eating, just eating less, and there's your 500.

If you can do that for four days, you know that on the Thanksgiving Day you have literally "banked", so to speak, 2,000 calories that you can overeat that day. And you can have the wine, have the pie, and have whatever it is that you're going to have. Even if you do this and then by the other weekend it's all even, there are still going to be some feelings of guilt, there's still going to be some little voice in your head saying "On man, I wish I didn't eat that much." But at least it won't be anywhere near as bad. No matter what the feeling is you'll know logically that you under-ate before and that it really is a wash from Sunday to the following Sunday.

And I would want to always say, "Prepare for it," meaning cut the calories or create the deficit before you get to that day, because if you try to make up for it afterwards, that's a whole lot worse, and emotionally that feels way worse, and mentally it's way more stressful than it is to take care of it beforehand. You might want to go low calorie the following day regardless

but don't try to fix the whole day just with the one day afterwards. You're kind of setting yourself up for failure if you're going to eat the calories and then try to fix it afterwards.

Brad Howard: Right, John and I travel a lot. I mean, once or twice a month, we're out of town. I mean, for us, the reason we're telling you this is because this is how we live. Okay, so holidays for most people, it's kind of like the way we live regularly. So when we go out we're entertaining people and having a good time with meetings etc. You know that you're not going to be eyeballing every single thing. I mean, you're going to have a couple of drinks and extra food. But the other thing that happens as well is if you have an idea of what you've been trying to do, if you've got a goal, even on the days that you do know that you're going to eat more, you're still aware of it. So it's not like you just dive in face first in pie, but you're still kind of aware.

Like for instance, I had dessert last night, and we don't eat a lot of dessert but we just wanted some apple pie. I had one slice and I knew it. I was like, "Oh yeah, that's going to be good."

John Barban: Yeah, you're aware but you could still have it and part of this is just removing the guilty feeling.

Brad Howard: Yeah.

John Barban: It gets pretty bad when people start beating themselves up afterwards. We are all tempted by food, especially at social gatherings, you can't avoid it. It's a losing proposition to show up and try being in "control" than it is to just not show up.

Brad Howard: Right.

John Barban: By showing up, that's your admission that, "Okay, I'm just going to do what the social convention is." It's really difficult to show up and just pick at the salad and not have any of the mashed potatoes and avoid the bread etc. What's the point of even showing up? I mean, what you are showing up for is partly to eat all that food, and there's no reason that should cause you to gain weight if you just spend some time doing some work beforehand, and this gets into the concept of covert nutrition and showing people what you're doing versus not showing them what you're doing. It's like there are two ways you can eat or you're going to eat, or there are two faces of your eating life. One of them is your alone time, and one of them is your in-front-of-other-people time. And it would seem as though the time you spend in front of other people when you're eating has more constraints. There's even some social obligation there that is more constrained than when you're by yourself.

You will win the battle of weight loss not based on how you eat socially but based on how you eat alone.

So if you and I are going out for dinner tonight, if I can just keep a handle on things between now and then when I'm spending most my day alone then I allow myself enough room that tonight I can eat wherever we go, I can enjoy the food there and not worry about it and still hit my caloric needs for the day, that is kind of a win.

But if all day long I'm snacking and I go out and I indulge a bit more than I should and by the time we're going out for dinner, I've already eaten all the way up to my caloric needs for the day, now during that entire dinner, somewhere in the back of my mind I'll be thinking, "Oh man, all of this is already too much, no matter what I eat here, I'm over". Not only that I'm over, but I'll feel guilty about it and I may not even enjoy myself as much. It just ruins the whole event. But when I'm by myself, it's just me against myself whereas when I'm socially eating or when I'm with somebody, now, to some degree, you have to accommodate the other person. It's just part of the social convention. This is a part of the human condition.

So like you said, I think you win the battle during the alone times. It's not your ability to be "in control" in front of people.

It's your ability to be in control when no one's around.

That way you can go with the societal current when there are people around.

Brad Howard: You're not going to eat the same around other people as you will by yourself. I mean you just won't, like even if in your mind (let's just use the six meals a day or five meals a day example), if you say, "All right,

this is how I'm going to eat and all of my meals are going to be equal." And then you go out to dinner and you're going to try to make that one equal too. It's just not going to happen.

John Barban: Especially if the other person you're with isn't doing that. It's just going to be so awkward. You'll be taking things off your plate, leaving things behind and asking for odd portion sizes. I would find it difficult to be with that person.

Brad Howard: Think about the pressures with that. So you're sitting across from another person, they're not doing what you're doing. Maybe they are overweight themselves, maybe they have low self-esteem, all that other stuff, so then they see you doing this and the first thing that is likely to come to their mind is it's insulting. Like you're almost insulting that other person. It's almost like showing them up.

I think that a lot of people disclaim to the world that they're going on diet and they are getting in shape not because they really want to go on a diet or to get in shape, but to show off. It's like a T-shirt. I'm wearing an "I'm getting in shape" T-shirt, and nobody really wants to get in shape, they just put on the front, like they are trying to get in shape. And so what they do is that when they're in public, they have this public persona of "I'm trying to get in shape." So they might go to the gym. They might control themselves around other people on what they eat, so people think, "Oh yeah, this person, they're eating well." And what you think is happening and you think these other people are there to try to support you. And they're going to say, "what you're doing is good, you're eating healthy." That's not the

way it works because when you do that you open yourself up to a lot of things.

Number one, you open yourself up to all the types of persecution on what's healthy and what's not because people will start asking you what you're doing and why you're doing it, and then everybody and their Momma has an opinion on how you should do it. So you have that.

Number two; you also have the "chasing more with more" aspect when it comes to exercise because now you have to prove to everybody that you're an exercisaholic and that you're really trying to lose.

And then the final thing it does is causes you to have virtually no integrity with yourself because what you do when no one's looking is that you go grab the cookies. You go grab the other stuff because what you're doing in essence is putting on a show for everybody else when what you should be doing is trying to better yourself. If you're trying to prove something to everybody else then you're letting yourself down. You're actually betraying yourself because of the way you eat when nobody else is around.

So what we do and what we're saying is that there are two major drivers of weight loss. The first one is your social responsibilities. I mean what you are pretty much required to do as a human being. You have to interact with people and eat with your spouse and your kids and all this stuff. If you don't do that it's going to feel weird. It just does, when people start asking

questions, and then you have to deal with that persecution that you get when you talk to other people about what you're doing who don't understand what you're trying to do.

John Barban: So hopefully everyone listening gets the idea that it's the not glamorous work and the stuff people don't see that causes all the results. I've thought a lot about this, especially after this Mark Haub, that professor from Kansas State, did his "Twinkie Diet" (which, by the way, he never called it that, the media called it that). All he was trying to prove was that calories in and out matter for weight loss, and everyone's chastising him for being irresponsible and people are going to take it the wrong way and they are just going to try to eat twinkies to lose weight. And he is saying, "No, all I was doing was trying to point out that people lose their focus and think it's the type of food when it's just the amount, and that's it." But again, the slings and arrows come out, everyone else has their opinion. People are saying, "Oh, he's going to get sick later," or, "this just can't possibly be good for you." And that's just people clinging to their beliefs.

He's not putting on the show, he's not wearing the T-shirt. He's eating what a lot of people consider junk, and he didn't care. He's a professor. He's just seeing what would work. He's not trying to show off. He's not trying to make a statement about what's the right kind of diet. All he's doing is just peeling away the layers of nonsense. He's like, "Okay, so it's clearly just calories. From there you can decide what those calories are and where you will get them from."

Brad Howard: Yeah.

John Barban: And that was it. He wasn't trying to make any judgment about the food industry or the raw food industry, or the big food versus organic locals, none of that. He wasn't making any statements like that, but everyone jumped to those conclusions.

So when you start making a change, everyone is going to see you through their own lense of their own insecurities. So no matter what you do, you will get picked on. That's for sure. If you declare it, people will pick on you because you'll never be able to do it right for everybody. And even if you are the most obsessive compulsive eater and you work out all the time, and everything is raw and organic, someone will pick on you for being like that. Someone will pick on you for all of this stuff no matter what path you choose.

Brad Howard: Right.

John Barban: In the end, it's "Do you get the result you want? Are you happy? Did you feel good? Do you like the way it looks?"

And then everyone else can go to hell, because it's hard enough to do it on your own let alone have someone else pick on you. I know we've already covered this point in the previous podcast but we're going to deliver this point a lot because this happens every single day.

Brad Howard: Yeah. Yeah, it does, and if we had to tell you what our T-shirt says, like what's the word I'm looking for?

John Barban: Our slogan or a logo.

Brad Howard: Our slogan or logo, our "identity" as to what we do. It seems that the only way people would lose weight is if they attach some sort of identity to it first. An identity like; I'm a healthy person or I am a paleo person etc.

John Barban: Yeah, let me run with that for two seconds. I was talking to Pilon about this today because I was struggling with why people were attacking the results of this guy's study of himself. People just didn't want to accept the fact that he lost weight eating mostly snack-cake type foods and some protein powder and a can of vegetables.

Brad Howard: Yeah, and some vitamins, I think.

John Barban: Yeah. It sounds gross. It's not like anyone will actually want to eat that way, but he was just trying to prove that the calories are all that matter. And the problem is the media needed to qualify it with something. They needed to anoint it the Junk Food Twinkie Diet, but he didn't himself. He had no "identity" for it. It was purely an experiment. In an academic lab, (even though this wasn't a full-on trial), things don't have an "identity",

but people need to attach themselves to an identity. So I don't think anyone can even lose weight (or at least will find it very difficult) without an identity to associate it with. So can you just lose weight eating less? Can you just tell people it was just that? What was your identity for that? "Oh, I just ate less." "Hey, what do you mean? How? Like what did you do it with? less carbs? Did you not eat after seven pm? Were you a vegetarian? Was it Paleo? Was it raw food? Well, wait a minute. I don't get it. Was it a blood-type diet? I don't understand you just "ate less."

People don't get that that's all it is. And I don't think it's because they don't get the concept of calories, but rather the "identity" is missing. People think "Well, I need to, in my head, categorize what you just did. And if you don't give me an identity that makes sense to me, then I guess I just have to attack it." But as soon as you say you did it within an identity, they are like, "Oh okay, yeah, you did it with low carb. I get that". Or "you did a Zone style, sure, I get that". Or, "oh, you were a Paleo, I get that." So people get it when there is an identity. But they don't get it when you reduce it down to just statistics and numbers like any scientist would.

Brad Howard: When you put a really solid goal in place, the actions you would take become really obvious. And so what these identities do is make the action steps obvious.

John Barban: Sure, even the fitness competitor/bodybuilder who is using pharmaceuticals to get to their look, that's an identity.

Brad Howard: Sure.

John Barban: They just say, “I’m going for a look that’s beyond what most people are even interested in, and I do things that most people aren’t willing to do.” But that’s an identity, and none of them is better or worse than any of the others, it’s just the way that person wants to do it. And as soon as someone attacks somebody for how they’re doing it, well that’s not really a “you” thing, that’s a “them” thing. That’s that other person’s issue with themselves needing everybody around them to validate their position. And that’s why I think everyone got bent out of shape about this guy and his experiment because it attacked, (although he didn’t mean to), but it seemed to attack other people’s identities for being one style of food eater over another, ex: “it has to be whole raw foods” etc, but just not junk food, just not stuff you can buy in a vending machine. That really shook a lot of people because if raw whole foods for weight loss is what you stood for, and some guy comes along and says, “Well, I lost weight and my cholesterol is better and I did it all with Twinkies and snack cakes.”...well, what does that make you...it makes you the person that stresses and obsesses about specific food choices for no reason.

Brad Howard: Even amongst the three of us, we have different identities about how we eat, Pilon basically is just straight up fasting.

John Barban: Yeah, he lives that lifestyle. I mean, that’s it.

Brad Howard: If you came across him and it was lunch time and it was a fasting day, he will be like, “No, I’m fasting.”

John Barban: He would sit with you and he would have coffee or something. He just won’t eat if it’s his fasting day.

Brad Howard: Sure, with me, I guess this is just kind of something I came up with myself and you’re like me as well, but we don’t even show that face at all. Like you will really never know unless you have any type of insight into our lives, like consistent insight, where you’re hanging out with us like 24 hours a day.

John Barban: Yeah, or here listening to us. That’s funny because the world knows about this because we’re broadcasting this but people in our lives are like, “Oh, really? You don’t eat after a certain hour. You do that?”

Brad Howard: Yeah.

John Barban: People close to us don’t know this, but everybody who finds us this way knows.

Brad Howard: Yeah, that's kind of the funny thing. So John and I, if we have to have an identity, it's more rebellious, if I had to say anything else. It's kind of like the ghost diet.

John Barban: It is. It's hidden. It seems we're all around the point, but not on the point. The point is you don't have to show it to anybody and it seems to be easier if you don't.

Brad Howard: Yeah.

John Barban: And that doesn't mean you do it alone and you don't have support. Clearly that's what the community is for and you obviously have people in your lives that you do need support from, but you have to pick and choose who you will invite into that crowd. And you probably already know it, but there's going to be someone that's close to you that actually provides emotional support in other areas that will still sabotage your weight loss effort or your body-shaping efforts. It could be a parent, it could be a sibling, it could be a significant other. Who knows? It could be one of your kids. I don't know, it's just all over the place where it will come from. Someone will be supportive that you didn't expect it from, and someone will not be as supportive as you'd like that also you didn't expect it from.

Brad Howard: But what the big thing is it's not the big comments that come out. It's the little stuff. I mean even my mom not too long ago, she was

like, “You need to stop dropping down. You look like you’re getting too skinny.”

John Barban: But it’s all in her eyes and what she’s used to.

Brad Howard: Yeah, because she is used to seeing my face fatter.

John Barban: Well my mom says the same thing about me. I hear her making little comments to other people. When she is talking about me she’ll say: “Well, I don’t know, I think this is small enough.” And I’m over 180 pounds, like what does she mean small? But it’s just that she’s so used to seeing me bulkier and bigger when I was powerlifting and when I was really big. In her mind, she has framed me as bigger, so now when she sees me like this it’s still somewhat of a struggle for her. I mean, obviously, she doesn’t bug me about it, but it’s still there. And like you said, little comments get dropped here and there.

Brad Howad: Yeah, and they’re not intentional. They are not trying to sabotage you. The other thing you have to realize is that the majority of people out there aren’t intentionally trying to sabotage you personally. They’re not.

John Barban: No, what they’re doing is protecting their own emotions and their own view of how the world is supposed to be.

Brad Howard: And their own view of you as well.

John Barban: Well, that's what I meant when I say "how the world is supposed to be". They have a view of what you were and that made sense in their world, and all of a sudden you went and changed that, and then they're thinking, "Oh man, that just changed. What is that?" So now they have to re-categorize what they think you are.

Brad Howard: Sure, and most people tend to have your best interest at heart, at least feeling-wise. Like a perfect example, essentially we are entrepreneurs and there are just certain people that don't get that and parents and people. My dad gets it because he's kind of an entrepreneur, but other people in your life might not get that because they think it's risky and they tell you all the reasons why it won't work until it works, and then they tell you, "Oh man, I knew it would work the whole time."

John Barban: Right, yeah.

Brad Howard: And that doesn't mean they are bad people. It's just the way it is.

John Barban: Most people are just doing the best they can with what they got.

Brad Howard: Right.

John Barban: Even when it comes to support, and sometimes it actually comes out the complete opposite way. Some people will shoot down what you are doing because they actually think they are helping you, even though they're not.

Brad Howard: Yeah.

John Barban: But the one major point, somewhere along the line, the other person is looking out for themselves. So there is a moment where it will flip such that they are protecting themselves no matter what it does to you, (if what you are doing bothers them enough about their own self perception).

Brad Howard: Oh, it will happen. It does happen every day.

John Barban: Do you see what we're saying? No matter who the person is, there is a line. Like for instance, on the Adonis site, there is a guy who is getting in great shape for a contest and for the last 11 weeks (we're approaching the 12th week of the contest), he said his girlfriend is totally supportive and now all of a sudden, the switch flipped, (I don't know if I could say attacking him), but all of a sudden she wasn't supporting him

anymore. She said, "I think you are taking this too far." He is one week away!

Brad Howard: Yeah.

John Barban: And it's happening in that last week, but my point is a line gets crossed with everybody, (well, not with everybody), but it can be crossed and no one knows where the line is...where even the closest person to you who is supposed to be your last person you can lean on...they might even turn on you. In his case I think he got lighter than her.

Brad Howard: That was it.

John Barban: Then she's thinking, "I think he would be lighter than me." But whatever it is, you're just trying to get in shape and then all of a sudden this person is says "I think you shouldn't do that anymore." And you're left thinking, "What the hell did I do wrong?" It's not you. It's them. You've crossed the line that changed how they feel about themselves enough that now you've kind of forced them to play their hand. They either have to now get in shape to keep up or they are worried, they are insecure, but something happened and it's usually an insecurity thing. Now, all of a sudden, they are in this uncomfortable space, and you're just sitting there doing your own thing and you're thinking, "How did this possibly affect you that much?" But it does.

Brad Howard: Yeah, and we talked about this on Adonis a while back and this kind of goes to this psychology, but what you have to realize is that everybody at all times, are only going to do the things that are in their best interest. I mean, even by helping an old lady across the street, it's in their best interest because it makes them feel good. You don't give in to your husband if he wants a big screen TV. The only reason you do it is because you feel like ultimately it's in your best interest too.

John Barban: Yeah, within the context of your relationship.

Brad Howard: Yeah.

John Barban: So hopefully, for the closest people to you their best interest is to support you, but somewhere that can flip for them, where they think for some reason that, "Well, I don't want to support you anymore."

Brad Howard: Right. And here is the other side of this coin that we haven't talked about. I don't think we've ever talked about it, but the big thing is that approaching it this way will actually save a lot of your relationships as well. Because what you are doing is you're putting these things out there and you're getting results but you're not really putting it in anybody's face. So not only are you not giving anybody a chance to say anything or do anything, but things get a little bit easier on you as well. But the thing is

like with all the strife that comes up a lot of the times, like how you are eating and the whole, “If you’re not on my team, screw you” type of a deal that comes across when you are making these big changes when you are really up front about it...They don’t happen. You don’t run into that stuff because you’re the same person around them now as you were two months ago. There is nothing that has changed. You might be smaller, but it’s not a big deal. I mean, you do the same things. You’re not trying to show them up.

John Barban: Yeah, I guess to wrap it all up into one thing, you want to somehow make the transformation happen such that all they ever see is you are getting smaller, but they don’t see how it happens. Like you said last week, the closer you can make it look like magic to everybody, the better.

Brad Howard: Yeah, nobody wants to hear about how hard you worked at it. Nobody wants to hear that. Everybody wants to believe there is a magic cure.

John Barban: Now, you can share it all with everyone in the forums because everyone is trying to do the same.

Brad Howard: Sure.

John Barban: We'll never let anyone attack anyone in there. Let's just say that won't be tolerated at all, and it doesn't ever happen. It never happens on the guys' side so I can't imagine it would ever happen on the girl's side.

Brad Howard: Yeah.

John Barban: But people in your life may not understand it, and we do, they may not. They don't have to understand it, and like we said, this isn't like keeping up with the Jones' by buying the same clothes or having the same stuff or even making the same money or buying the same items. This is totally different. When someone changes the look and shape of their body, I mean, that affects everything.

Brad Howard: Yeah.

John Barban: I'm only just starting to realize with all the people we've had go through contests and stuff how much the people around them are hypersensitive when you change.

Brad Howard: Yeah, well, here is the big thing, I guess we'll close off with this, but this competition that you are perceiving, (and obviously we're not going to talk about Transformation Contests, but even the Transformation Contests), the contest is you against you. It's not you against everybody else because when you start trying to compare yourself to everybody else,

you lose. It's like swimmers and runners and people like that. Like Mike Phelps isn't competing against other swimmers. He's competing against the clock. I mean, that's where world records are broken. They are not broken because I beat somebody so many times. It's just "what's my time". It's the same thing with sprinters; "what's my time?" It's same thing with a marathon; "what's my time?" That's all that matters. It's improving your time.

And so it kind of comes back around to what are you doing when nobody is looking. I mean, are you betraying yourself to get the results? Because this is the game against you, that's the area of life you control explicitly. There are no hot zones going on right here, so what are you doing? I mean, are you making sure you don't have things in the house that you're going to gobble up when you get really hungry. Are you doing those things? Or are you trying to sneak meals that nobody else can see, but who cares? You are not doing it for them; you are doing it for you.

And then the second thing, here is the second thing and I want to touch on this because it asks the questions: "Why are you working out anyway?"

I'm talking about exercise for performance versus performance and shape, more specifically I like to look at it as performance, because it keeps people progressing, like at least for the guys, but even for the women. You should have a goal weight that you are trying to lift the next time.

John Barban: Yeah, well, that's already happening organically. But if 12 weeks from now you're lifting identical weights, you would probably want to try to be lifting a bit more, at least on some of the lifts, right? Like if you can't do a full pushup, but you're doing pushups on the edge of a bench or on your knees, you should want to try to graduate up to a full pushup on your toes, and then from there maybe have your feet on the bench. Or for step up and press, that's the bane of everyone's existence right now.

Brad Howard: Yeah.

John Barban: Get to the point where you don't want to have to drop weights throughout the sets and then from there once you are using the same weight across sets, maybe try to go a little bit heavier on the first set.

Brad Howard: Yeah.

John Barban: It's all about progressive resistance, and you are not going to blow up and turn into the Incredible Hulk, the muscles will just become stronger, more conditioned, tighter and toned looking. It's very hard for girls to put on size, so a goal of lifting heavier weights is not a bad goal at all.

John Barban: Okay, we went way off track here. The point is it's the stuff you do when you are alone that's probably going to dictate whether or not

you actually can make real progress, especially on the nutrition side. Specifically for holidays since we are all approaching the holiday season, it's all those days before Thanksgiving and after Thanksgiving, and before Christmas and after, it's those days. The alone time on those days is what's really going to dictate if you can cruise through the holiday season not only just not gaining but still losing (if weight loss is your goal).

Brad Howard: At least it gives you a ballpark area of how to kind of manage that and not gain. That's the other picture, too. What a lot of people don't get is there is a point where you have to determine what your actual maintenance levels are. All right, I guess we've got that covered.

John Barban: I think so hopefully. Well, I think we'll need some feedback on it if we actually came to a concluding point or not...

Brad Howard: Well, if not, we can touch on it in some extra blog posts.

John Barban: Yeah, it will just stimulate conversations for the next one.

Brad Howard: Cool. All right, well, that's it for today. For John Barban, I am Brad Howard and that's your Venus Index podcast.
