

YOUR 3-STEP PLAN to a healthy festive season

HFG dietitian Zoe Wilson shows you how you can enjoy the festive season ahead and come out the other end healthy and energised for 2013!



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As Christmas looms there's so much to look forward to; get-togethers with friends and family, parties, canapés, cocktails, dinners and, oh, the mince pies and Christmas pud! However, all that fun can play havoc with our energy levels and our health.

Up to two thirds of adults gain more than 0.5kg (and some as much as 3kg!) over the six week Christmas/New Year period, suggest studies from the US. The double whammy is we often struggle to lose it again. Indeed, research has found weight gain over this time accounted for 51 per cent of annual weight gain, meaning once it goes on, it's often staying put. Aussies are suffering a similar fate too, with a 2011 survey finding 48 per cent of young women make resolutions to lose weight in the New Year.

This is also the time of year we're least likely to look after ourselves in general. There are late nights plus the less-than-healthy eating that comes with cocktail snacks or restaurant dinners - meaning we're not getting the nutrition that helps us feel bright-eyed and energised. Pair this with perhaps a few extra drinks and our sleep patterns also get disrupted, which makes us feel exhausted and prone to crave more unhealthy snacks.

The good news? It is possible to enjoy all the treats that come along with Christmas and still feel great. It just takes a little planning. So try these steps to a happy, healthy festive season.

step 1 Pace yourself for parties!

It's okay to go a little overboard a couple of times during the silly season. The key to staying healthy is overall balance.

It's more important to make sure that those occasional indulgences don't become a daily habit. It's the kilojoules over a period of several days or weeks that you need to think about, not each individual day, so don't beat yourself up about one day of feasting! Instead, plan for it.

The best way to do this? At the start of every week, sit down with your diary and figure out a basic meal plan for the week, working around any events or parties. That's where you're going to be eating the most kilojoules, so plan out your non-party meals to be slightly lower in kilojoules and filled with healthy, nourishing foods to sustain your energy. (Check out the delicious Power packed dinners on p44 which are filled with energy-giving

nutrients to keep you going.)

Filling up on lower-kilojoule foods, consistently, at non-party meals will help you balance out the treats without feeling like you're missing out. Here are some practical tips to get you started.

• Stock up on festive fuel

Healthy eating starts with a kitchen stocked with fresh, nutritious ingredients - it makes grabbing a good lunch or dinner fast and easy. So nudge aside the turkey and trimmings crowding out the fridge for hearty helpings of these:

➡ Super-sized supplies of your favourite salad ingredients

Your shopping trolley should be filled with brightly-coloured vegies. Stock up on big bags of crunchy salad leaves, cherry tomatoes, capsicums, Lebanese cucumbers, radishes and sweet Dutch carrots - whatever your favourite salad ingredients are. Aim to fill half your plate at lunch and dinner with a large salad made up of the ingredients you really enjoy (hold the mayo - we've given you some tasty, healthier dressings, see p56). Salad is not only low in kilojoules, but it fills you up as it provides plenty of fibre. If you're making lunches for the

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week at work, it's both fast and economical to pack a large lunchbox of salad ingredients at the beginning of each week. Then, each lunchtime you can simply add bread or crispbread and a serving of chicken, tuna, veggie patties, tofu or leftover roast beef for a healthy and energy-sustaining lunch.

➡ **Get grainy** Start your day with a filling, high-fibre cereal or wholegrain toast.

Make a conscious effort to choose grainy bread instead of white at lunch, or try having brown rice, wholemeal pasta or quinoa at dinner instead of white rice or couscous.

Wholegrains are good for sustained energy because they take longer to be digested – just what you need to keep you going and also to help control your appetite over the day.

“Keep a supply of healthy snacks handy so you’re not tempted by less healthy options”

➡ **Stock up on better snacks**

When the vending machine at work or the pantry at home tempts you with you biscuits or chocolate bars, it can be all too easy to give in. Set up your own line of defence by ensuring you have a supply of yummy, satisfying snacks as healthy, go to alternatives.

Add to your shopping list single-serve tubs of low-fat

yoghurt, snack packs of mixed fruit and raw nuts, high-fibre wholegrain muesli bars, fresh fruit or some hommous and grainy crackers.

➡ **Go for fresh summer fruit**

Feeling peckish? Satisfy a sweet tooth with a juicy mango or peach. Or, top a tropical fruit salad with yoghurt and muesli for a tasty brekkie. Fruit is packed with vitamins, minerals and fibre.

➡ **Make your bar fridge a mineral water oasis**

Because parties go hand-in-hand with drinking, it's all too easy, come December, to find ourselves drinking every night. Try making non-party evenings an alcohol-free zone.

Opt for chilled mineral water – put it into a favourite fancy glass if you wish – add some ice, a squeeze of fresh lemon and mint leaves, or a little low-kilojoule cordial if you need extra flavour.

step 2 Beat Christmas burnout

Sometimes it can all seem a bit much with the extra organising, shopping and socialising we squeeze in at this time of year. But, with a few simple steps you can keep your energy levels high, resist the high-fat/high-sugar foods that often go hand-in-hand with tiredness, and avoid that frazzled feeling that leaves you wishing for the New Year.

• **Time poor shortcuts to exercise**

Regular exercise is key to helping you manage your weight and mood over the Christmas period. Not only does exercise burn energy, but research has shown it can help to manage your appetite as well. You'll also feel better able to cope with the stress that can come with this time of year. Too busy? Too stressed to exercise? Here's how!

➡ **Disguise your exercise** Instead of exercise feeling like a chore, pick something you like to do and turn it into exercise. Take the kids out for an afternoon stroll, a game of cricket or throw a Frisbee. Instead of organising a catch-up in a coffee shop why

not organise a walk somewhere? Or, get into the Christmas spirit and take an evening stroll looking at the Christmas lights in your neighbourhood.

➡ **Get Christmas-ready**

Decorating the tree and even Christmas shopping will count towards your exercise for the day and help burn kilojoules.

➡ **Ramp it up** If you know you're in for a big party week, make your exercise sessions a little longer or push yourself a bit harder. If you already walk, cycle, swim or run, try doing it faster for a few minutes then slow it back down for a few minutes. At the gym, instead of 30 minutes on the treadmill, try walking, skipping then cycling on the stationary bike for 10 minutes each. Mixing it up staves off boredom and you'll burn more energy, too.

➡ **Step back in time** You never would have slept in on Christmas day when you were a kid, so why not wake early and enjoy a walk before everyone else gets up and the madness begins? Better still, take everyone with you so it keeps them active, too. It'll also get your metabolism going so you'll burn a little more energy later on in the day.

• **How a lack of sleep adds kilos**

More socialising means less sleep. Plus, alcohol and large dinners can disrupt the few hours you do get, which could also contribute to weight gain.

Sleep deprivation disrupts our appetite hormones. It causes grehlin (our 'hungry' hormone)

Try these shortcuts to more exercise

- *Put up Christmas tree
- *Do the groceries
- *Vacuum
- *Meet Jenny for a walk
- *Put up fairy lights
- *Organise a family cricket game

to go up and leptin (our 'not hungry anymore' hormone) to go down, so we feel hungrier during the day. Tiredness also leads us to look for high-energy foods for a quick boost.

Sleep deprivation also affects our fat storage hormones, so our bodies are more likely to store fat, even if we're eating the same amount of food each day.

Try to get at least seven hours of sleep each night, even if it means leaving a party a little early. This is particularly important if you have a few functions to go to that week. Limit the amount of alcohol you drink (see p23 for tips), and try to keep your evening meal balanced, even if you're eating out. For some people, eating and drinking just before bed can disrupt sleep too. If this is you, try to keep dinner to a few hours before bed time. If you've been drinking, make sure you drink lots of water to rehydrate before going to bed.

For those times when we have short or bad sleep, remember the next day you'll be more prone to not-so-healthy eating. So, pack your lunch and snacks for the day and get right back to your health-smart festive routine. ➤

Your summer essentials

Keep your fridge stocked with healthy foods like these

crunchy salad

fresh fruit

grainy bread

plenty of water

a more energised you!



step 3

Don't stop the party!

We've all been there – hoovering up the canapés at a party and washing them down with alcohol only to realise the next day, you can have too much of a good thing. Finding balance between fun and health takes planning. Once mastered, it's a tool you can use any time of year.

➡ **Eat first** Eat a small snack (such as a piece of fruit or a yoghurt) before you go, so you're not starving when you get to the party. This way, you can be selective when the snacks are passed around and you won't be as tempted to overload your plate at dinner. If you're drinking, try having a snack to reduce the effect the alcohol has on you. It will also help you to stave off the increased appetite that drinking alcohol can give you, too.

➡ **Turn the other cheek** Try positioning yourself at the other end of the room to the nibbles or buffet table to lessen the temptation of eating too much. Research has shown the longer you stand next to tempting food, the more likely you are to pick it up. If you get swept up in conversation at the buffet table, steer yourself so you are facing the other way.

➡ **Be guided by your hunger** Sometimes, no matter how fabulous the restaurant or food served at a dinner party, we may not be all that hungry. Why not order two entrées rather than an entrée and a main, or skip the entrée altogether?

• Dining out

Restaurants are designed to tempt our tastebuds with appealing starters, hearty mains

and decadent desserts. And there's nothing wrong with an occasional hearty feast! But at Christmas time, where one feast can often turn into many, here are some helpful tips.

➡ **Aim for balance** Choose a dish that contains both protein (meat, fish, chicken, beans or egg) and carbohydrate (potato, rice, pasta, couscous, corn or bread). While many restaurants make salads and vegetables optional sides, they're not optional for a balanced, healthy meal. So order the extra greens and try to make them fill half your plate. It will help keep you satisfied and maximise the variety of nutrients you get from your dinner.

➡ **Stick to 2 courses** Choose to have either an entrée and main, or a main and dessert.

➡ **Share with a friend** Sharing an entrée or dessert still gives you a taste and leaves you feeling more satisfied, but reduces how much you will eat over the night.

➡ **Know what's in your dish** Don't be afraid to ask about how the food is prepared. Try asking for grilled instead of fried, or for the sauce on the side. Most chefs won't mind amending the dishes for you.

SMART WAYS TO ENJOY A DRINK

Cocktails, champagne, chilled wine and beers are part and parcel of Christmas time for many people. The key is to pace yourself. Consider this: a large glass of wine has about the same number of kilojoules as a slice of ham and cheese pizza. So a couple of glasses here and there can quickly add up. Here are a few tips to slow you down:

• Drink like a fish

Water, not alcohol! Make sure you're hydrated before you get to the party so you're not trying to quench your thirst with alcohol.

• **Keep count** Try not to let the host or waiter fill your glass before it's empty otherwise you can quickly lose track of how many you've had.

• **Offer to drive** This is the easiest way to avoid overdoing it and reduce any peer pressure to have a few extra glasses. Dilute

your drink with a mixer – try champagne with some orange juice, or a white wine spritzer.

• **Ask for spirits in a tall glass** Choose mineral or soda water or diet soft drink and add generously.

• **Go light** Less alcohol equals less kilojoules, so choose light beer or reduced-alcohol wine if you can.

• **Alternate** After each alcoholic drink, make sure you have a non-alcoholic drink to keep you hydrated and slow you down, preferably make it water!

• Surviving the all-you-can-eat buffet

When faced with a buffet, the most important thing is your attitude. Instead of thinking about 'getting your money's worth', you'll feel much better afterwards if you try to 'get your health's worth' instead.

➡ **Scope it out** Before you pick up your plate, spend a moment checking out what's on offer. Decide on the three or four items you like the look of the most then target them, instead of having a little bit of everything. Christmas is a time to enjoy, so allow yourself a little of those creamy temptations – the fact that you're controlling the portion size and not adding lots of extra, unwanted foods will pay rewards. Pile any space on your plate with as much fresh salad or veggies as you can (remember, filling half your plate is the ideal). This way, you can feel good about having what you really feel like, create a nutritious meal and finish feeling satisfied. It also means you'll be less likely to graze on high-kilojoule desserts or cheeses after your meal.

At the end of the day, the most important thing to remember at this time of year is that it's all about enjoyment and treats in moderation. Any of these little changes you can make will help you have a healthy, happy Christmas and New Year. [hfg](#)

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