

Health & Fitness Tips

DiETING - How to fight the Christmas bulge

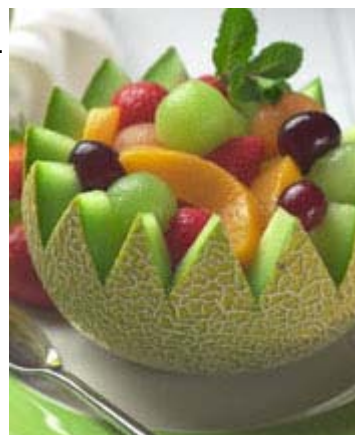
The festive season is a time to recharge our batteries and celebrate with family and friends. We quickly slip into 'holiday mode' and normal routine goes out the window. There are parties to go to and people to catch up with, and the social calendar is often overflowing with invitations. With all this celebrating, how, then, do we avoid those 'Christmas kilos' that seem to find their way so easily to our waistline?

When it comes to remaining fit and healthy today, there are many obstacles sent to test our resolve. Demands on our time are shaped by the rapid pace of life today. Society has responded to that pressure with advances in technology and the service industry, designed to save us time and effort. Food related advertising is capitalizing on this situation and contributing to a change in our view of normal eating. We are encouraged to eat more, cook less and look for convenience, instead of taking advantage of the abundance of fresh food choices available in Australia today.

Advertising seems to go into overdrive leading up to Christmas and we are flooded with images and products designed to tempt and entice. Food is always high on the agenda when planning for the festive season and over-indulgence is the order of the day. There are ways of avoiding the disappointment felt when you jump on the scales in January to find you are paying the price for accepting all those party invitations. With a little planning you can see the New Year in with smile on your face, knowing you have enjoyed your Christmas break and still managed to keep on track.

Here are a few tips to help you survive the festive season:

- Don't try and lose weight over Christmas. You will end up feeling deprived and miserable if you try to avoid all those special treats that make Christmas such a unique time of the year. Enjoy yourself, but aim to maintain your weight by being selective and choosing a little of the things you really love. Then it's back to healthy eating from January 2.
- Don't starve yourself to compensate for the unhealthy food you have eaten, or are likely to eat, at a party. Make sure you continue to eat your regular healthy meals and always have a healthy snack at home before heading off to a party. If you go to a party hungry you are more likely to fill up on high fat snacks.
- Avoid standing right next to the food at a party. It is easy to get carried away with the snacks if you get engrossed in a conversation whilst standing next to a plate of food. Pick up one savoury at a time, then walk away. If you have a tendency to over eat, decide how many savouries you are going to allow yourself and stick to it.
- Deep fried, crumbed and battered food, cheese platters and nuts are all high in fat. Try to avoid or limit the number of these you consume, choosing fruit, vegetable or bread based snacks instead.
- Drinks can add a lot of kilojoules to your intake. Alcohol, soft drinks, fruit juices and punch all contribute extra kilojoules. Mix spirits with diet soft drink or soda, or try a spritzer - ½ wine, ½ soda. Alternate an alcoholic drink with a glass of water. This will not only keep the kilojoules down, but reduce the total amount of alcohol consumed and keep you hydrated.
- Chat and mingle. Socializing will distract you from the food, and you are less likely to snack out of boredom.
- If you are entertaining at home, offer a selection of healthier, low fat alternatives, eg pretzels, rice crackers, pita chips, salsa and other low fat dips. Include some vegetable sticks to go with the dip, and take advantage of the wide range of delicious summer fruits available by having a fruit platter. Breads and foccacias are also low in fat.
- If you are taking a plate to a party, opt for a healthy alternative. A tropical fruit platter will make more of an impression than a packet of chips, and there is little preparation involved.
- For Christmas dinner, try including some lighter options, like the new super-lean hams, fresh salads and fresh or barbequed seafood. When preparing the turkey, remove the skin and fat before cooking and try stuffing with steamed rice, brandy-soaked dried apricots and toasted pine nuts.
- Listen to your body and stop eating when you feel full.



- Try and keep active. Organize a fun game of back yard cricket or volleyball. Go for a walk or bike ride with relatives or friends.
- If you know you have a party to go to that evening, get up in the morning and take the dog for a brisk walk. He will enjoy getting out and you will feel better for it.
- If you do really over do it, don't despair. Start afresh the next day with lots of healthy foods, water and some exercise.

Remember, a few parties don't make you overweight. It is what you do for the rest of the year that really matters. So relax and enjoy the festive season – just try and keep a little balance with your health and fitness and you can embrace the new year with enthusiasm instead of disappointment.