



Start the New Year feeling fabulous, not flabby, with these top tips for the festive season from the experts. By Rachel Smith

the Christmas diet

Q&A

Q What can I eat at drinks parties that won't stack the weight on?

According to a 2000 study published in the *New England Medical Journal* in the US, weight gained over the festive season tends to stick around.

Because many people consume more kilojoules in pre-dinner snacks than they do in their entire main meal, it's about making the right choices, says nutritionist Emma Hanna (EH). "Steer clear of cheeses, chips,

creamy sauces, dips and deep-fried snacks such as spring rolls. Nuts, such as pistachios, almonds or walnuts are okay, as long as you stick to a small handful. Ideally, though opt for low-fat options such as pretzels, salsas, rice crackers, prawns, cocktail onions and breadsticks with lean meat such as turkey or ham."

Q Is there a healthier option than a roast at Christmas time?

Believe it or not, the humble roast can be healthy, especially if you roast the

meat on a rack in the oven dish, or barbecue it, so that the fat drips away. And forget about roasting vegetables in large amounts of oil. Toss chopped root vegetables in a bowl with just a couple of tablespoons of olive or canola oil, stir until well coated, then place in a roasting dish and into the oven – they'll be crispy and far less fatty.

Or give the Christmas turkey a miss altogether. "A cold buffet lunch is a perfect alternative for our warm climate – why not try oysters, prawns and ▶

MEET THE EXPERTS

■■■ Dimitra Arthur (DA) is a psychologist with the national company Appetite Right. Visit www.appetiteright.com.au.

■■■ Emma Hanna (EH) is a Sydney-based nutritionist specialising in clinical nutrition issues including weight loss.

■■■ Jacqui Manning (JM) is a psychologist with Mind Advantage. Visit www.mindadvantage.com.au.

■■■ Rebecca Rule (RR) is a Sydney-based personal trainer who specialises in weight-loss education and body sculpting.



smoked salmon, cold slices of ham and turkey, and a range of salads. For dessert, a fruit platter, low-fat ice-cream or sorbets are good options," says EH.

Q **How can I moderate my alcoholic intake over the silly season?**

Alcohol is high in kilojoules and it stimulates your appetite, which is why it's that much harder to ignore the chips and dip. Studies show drinking alcohol with your meal can increase your food intake by up to 840kJ, so drink in moderation.

"Opt for white wine spritzers, light beers and diet soft drinks," suggests EH.

"Drinking slowly and alternating one alcoholic drink to non-alcoholic choices such as mineral water, soda or orange juice will also lower your intake. Avoid getting into buying 'rounds' – always drink at your own pace, and don't drink on an empty stomach – food helps slow down alcohol absorption."

Q **If I indulge at Christmas parties, how much extra exercise do I need to do to ward off weight gain?**

"Ideally, you'd want to be doing an hour's exercise per day – so two sessions of resistance/weights work, and four to five sessions of cardio per week to ensure you're burning off any extra kilojoules you may be consuming," advises RR.

Q **I love socialising – but how can I avoid pressure from friends about what I eat and drink?**

Psychologist Dimitra Arthur (DA) says, "A lot of people don't follow their natural appetite signals during this time due to peer pressure. Often, the person trying to get you to eat or drink more feels guilty for overindulging and so they put the pressure on you to do the same."

Caught in this position, it's up to you to be decisive by saying things like, "No, I'm full, thanks".

Q **I always binge at parties. Are there tactics I can try to stop myself?**

Binge-eating, or 'eating amnesia', is easy to do at parties because we're distracted. And because salty, high-fat snacks are generally low in fibre – which makes us feel full – it's easy to get carried away. To avoid binge-eating, eat a healthy dinner before going out. Starving yourself so you can 'afford' the extra kilojoules is

a no-no – you'll want to devour everything in sight.

Becoming aware of bingeing – and planning around it – is another strategy, says psychologist Jacqui Manning (JM).

"Figure out what you can realistically expect to eat and drink at events and set goals."

DA says, "It's best to tell yourself that nothing is off limits. If you do give in and have a couple of canapés, acknowledge it, don't let it become an excuse to binge."

Q **Should I wait until the New Year to start an exercise program?**

"People who postpone their health regime until the New Year tend to go crazy over Christmas and pack on the weight, so you really have to get the momentum and the mindset happening before you're faced by all the temptation," says personal trainer Rebecca Rule (RR). "Start before Christmas – you'll have more energy and look and feel better about yourself. A personal trainer can put together a realistic program for you to follow."



Q **I won't be able to keep up my gym program on holiday. What can I do?**

Holidaymakers are more likely to arrive home a couple of kilos heavier, according to a recent UK study. It's because our routines go out the window, says RR. "But why not try a few new forms of exercise? If you're at the seaside, swim laps – it's a great all-over body workout and tones arms, shoulders and back. Swim as many as you can and try to add 1-2 laps on each day. Power walks and beach jogs are also great for your backside and legs, and you can end your workout on the sand with three sets of sit-ups and push-ups.

"As a rule of thumb, anyone going on holidays should pack trainers, a sports bra, a pedometer and a resistance band so you can squeeze in a workout no matter what." Keep a food diary while you're away – studies show those who monitor their food intake consume 15 per cent less. ○