



Festive Fact File

This festive fact file will arm you with tips and tricks for you to be able to enjoy the Christmas period in a healthy and balanced way. Christmas can be a time where people often indulge in food and alcohol, piling on the calories and body weight. It is estimated that people gain an average of 0.5 to 1kg or more over this period after which 'dieting' and 'guilt' often precedes. However, Christmas can still be enjoyed by eating healthier options and avoiding weight gain. This festive fact file focuses on ways in which healthier options can still be just as tasty.

Planning Ahead

Plan your shopping list and schedule, for festive days in advance. Having healthier food choices available by making 'food swaps' reduces the temptation of finding unhealthier nibbles elsewhere. For example, planning a few swaps of nibbles and drinks can reduce the amount of calories significantly:

- Swap an average mince pie that provides around 250 calories with a mini version that will have around 80 calories.
- Buy plain popcorn, a handful provides an average of 70 calories with the equivalent of salted peanuts providing around 180 calories. In addition, eating salty foods will increase thirst. Consuming too much salt is linked to an increase in blood pressure.
- Buy dips that are based on yoghurt and tomato rather than cheese or cream, why not have crunchy vegetable sticks to dip rather than crisps or those high in salt and/or fat.
- Rather than sugary soft drinks, mixers and sparkling wines, have available, sugar free drinks, sparkling water and add a twist of lime or mint for a refreshing, calorie free drink. Sugar provides only empty calories.
- If you are going to a party, don't arrive hungry. Have a whole grain sandwich first so you are not tempted to consume high fat nibbles and highly processed foods. At events, fill up on healthy options first!

Festive meals

Media reports suggest that around 6,000 calories are consumed on Christmas day, this is about three times an average daily energy requirement. The main source of calories is often from added fat to meals, sugary drinks, nibbles and alcohol. Meals can still be tasty but a few changes can make a big difference. Some of the simplest changes are listed below:

- Aim to remove the skin from poultry before eating, this is where most of the fat lies, particularly saturated fat. Use alternative fats, such as olive oil, rapeseed or nut oils to cook in, rather than goose fat or lard to further reduce the saturated fats. Measure the amount rather than pouring onto dishes. Too much saturated fat will raise bad cholesterol (LDL) in your blood, which increases the risk of heart disease.
- Fill up on a variety of vegetables, aiming to cover at least one third of your plate, choose different textures and colours. Vegetables are a rich source of fibre, vitamins and minerals and different colours will provide unique nutrients. Steam vegetables rather than adding fat.
- Cut potatoes into large chunks if roasting in oil, these will soak up less fat than smaller chunks.
- Use the water from boiling/steaming vegetables to make gravy or other sauces and add extra herbs, this water is full of vitamins and has a great taste rather than processed gravy granules which are often high in salt.
- Use a stuffing that is based on chestnuts or fruit rather than sausage meat to reduce the fat and salt and to increase your fibre intake.
- For starters and desserts, rather than high fat pastries or foods high in sugar, choose fruit, vegetables and pulses. For example a warm lentil or squash soup, fresh fruit cocktail or warm stewed fruit or smoked salmon with a spicy rocket salad.
- Aim not to eat until full, eat vegetables first and leave space for an optional dessert. Eating until full is likely to make you feel bloated, uncomfortable and sleepy.

Alcohol

Alcohol and sugary mixers can potentially contribute significantly to your calorie intake. An average glass of wine (125mls) can provide over 100 calories, an average pint of beer can provide over 200 calories. Drinking alcohol is also linked to increased appetite and therefore increased food intake. If our food is salty, we are more likely to become thirsty. Watch the amount of alcohol you are drinking; if you have lost count, it is likely you have over-indulged!

Ensure you always have plenty of water to keep yourself hydrated and have non-alcoholic drinks available. Binge drinking is having a lot of alcohol in a short space of time; 6 or more units for women and 8 or more units for men. However this does not apply to everyone because people's tolerance levels are different. But if you are feeling drunk, it is likely that you are binge drinking. People who binge drink or get drunk are at a greater risk of health problems and this should be avoided. If you think you have drunk too much, avoid alcohol for at least 48 hours to give your body a chance of recovering.

Physical activity

Aim to include some physical activity during the festive season. Fresh air can clear the mind and a brisk walk can help burn off some of the calories consumed. For example in a 30 minute brisk walk you can use up to 200 calories. Recommendation is 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on at least 5 days a week. This can help prevent and manage over 20 health conditions. Conditions include heart disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer, obesity, and mental health.

The festive fact file is intended for adults as a general guide only and not a substitute for professional advice or a diagnosis. If you are on certain medication or suffer from a medical condition, seek individual advice from your health care professional.

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