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## Stay Healthy over Christmas, Hanukkah and New Year in 7 easy steps

By Lorraine Hannah

Well it is nearly the beginning of December, and like it or not, Christmas/Hanukkah/New Year is looming on the horizon for many of us. For those of us who do not celebrate it in our homes, there are still social engagements, office parties and meals to contend with. Each year we are squeezed into making more effort, buying more presents and more food than before.

There can be weeks of December and New Year where a constant stream of drinks and nibbles if offered where ever we go, our classes and gyms are closed when we want them, and at the same time, we are expected to look fabulous and cheerful all of the time. Well I say ENOUGH! We can socialize and have fun at this time of the year without having to compromise our healthy lifestyles. Here are seven ways to survive the season of gluttony;

**1. Keep to your exercise schedule:** it is tempting to let the dark nights, cold mornings, endless chores, shopping, and preparation get in the way of your usual exercise routine whether that is classes, gym, home routines, or walking programmes. Make sure that you mark in your diary the times that you will be exercising and stick to them as if they are an appointment with somebody special- your body deserves not to be neglected. Anyway, for once the gym will be empty and you can stay on the running machine for as long as you like!

**2. Stick to your healthy eating plan:** just because the supermarket shelves are groaning under the weight of Belgian chocolates and bumper packets of Pringles doesn't mean you HAVE to buy them. Ignore the special offers; don't buy 3 of something you would never usually buy just because it is festive, and NEVER walk through the Christmas food section! Keep your cupboards stuffed with healthy things. Don't forget that this is the best time of the year for citrus, so if you want something Christmassy then buy a huge pack of Satsuma's or Clementine's.

**3. Watch out for what you drink.** There may be parties, drinks after work, meals out, and social visits; for many people this will involve drinking more alcohol/mixers/soft drinks than usual. As I have discussed before, these drinks may have a detrimental effect on our weekly calorie intake.

Make sure that you eat before you go out drinking- hunger can lead to drinking too much too quickly. Make your first drink a sparkling mineral water- this ensures that thirst doesn't make you gulp your drink down. Match each alcoholic drink for a glass of water to stay hydrated and ensure that you don't drink too much. If you do not drink, still watch out for soft drinks, which are high in calories. Mix fruit juice with sparkling water, or drink water with a slice of lemon or lime.

Choose a spirit such as vodka and drink with plenty of fresh fruit juice or cranberry. Drink white wine spritzers, or make a luxury Bucks Fizz with good quality fresh orange juice and sparkling wine.



**4. Watch out for what you eat;** here are some ideas for healthier alternatives to party snacks:

- Swap Belgian chocolates for Dark Chocolate-covered Brazil nuts (rich in selenium and other antioxidants).
- Swap Peanuts for Unsalted seed and nut mix: almonds, Brazils, pumpkin and sunflower seeds, Soya nuts, hazelnuts- all rich in essential fatty acids. These will do you good, but don't go mad, even good fats will contribute to weight gain in excess.
- Swap Crisps (approx 33% fat) for Japanese rice crackers (often almost fat free), salted pretzels 3% fat or less (not the flavoured ones).
- Swap Little pastry snacks (mini-quiches, vol-au-vents, cheese straws etc) for Margarita Mini-pizzas, blinis/mini oat cakes with smoked salmon and half-fat cream cheese, bread sticks.
- Swap Crisps with dips (sour cream and chive, blue cheese etc) for hummus or low-fat yoghurt with onion and herbs. Make vegetable batons or bread sticks for dipping. Avoid creamy and cheesy dips,

**5. Be more active during the Christmas period;** Turn the television off and go for a walk after your Christmas lunch, this will wake you up and help ease that very full abdominal area! Spend some time playing games with family and friends; you may have forgotten how enjoyable this is.

**6. Keep a check on how you feel in your clothes;** If clothes that you normally wear start getting a bit uncomfortable or tight, it is time to cut down your food and drink intake or get more active. A good tip for gauging weight gain is to try on a belt that normally fits you, if it feels tight or you need to go out a notch or two you need to eat less and be more active!

**7. Enjoy yourself, have little bits of what you want,** but **EXERCISE RESTRAINT**. You do not have to go crazy just because everyone else is. You will feel much better going to bed without that horrible stretched feeling in your belly. Try serving or choosing green salad or vegetable soup before the main meal to suppress your appetite and discourage over eating. Buy small amounts of quality treats rather than the huge bags and boxes of special offer stuff. If it is there in huge quantities, you can bet you will eat in huge quantities.

Well you may scream Bah Humbug at me, but I know how hard this time of the year can be for people; hopefully by keeping ourselves in check and searching for healthy alternatives, we can all emerge in January still healthy, fit and happier than the people who bought the bumper packs of Pringles.

I hope you have a Merry Christmas and an even better New Year!

Yours in Health and Fitness

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