

## AMIAN HEALTH & WELLBEING - DECEMBER 2016



### How to Avoid Over Indulging this Christmas

Christmas is the season for making merry, and with all that tempting food and drink being handed around, it's hard to avoid a little festive indulgence. From mince pies and chocolates, to mulled wine and champagne, everyone has their favourite seasonal treat – and as long as you enjoy these specialities in moderation, there's no harm done. However, there is a tipping point where indulgence turns into overindulgence – and that's when Christmas merrymaking can begin to have harmful effects on your health.

To help you enjoy the Christmas festivities without regretting your choices come January, here are some tips for avoiding excess when it comes to eating and drinking this Christmas.

**Don't starve yourself to save calories** - While it may seem tempting to starve yourself throughout the day so you can justify eating more at a party later on, this strategy is likely to backfire. You'll end up feeling so hungry and weak by the time you get to the event that you'll end up consuming even more than you'd originally planned – most likely in the form of sugary and high-fat snacks.

Instead, start each day with a high-fibre, protein-rich breakfast to help you stay full and satisfied throughout the day, and eat a small, balanced snack before heading out to a social event so you won't arrive starving and ready to eat everything in sight. Take advantage of any healthier snack options on offer – such as veggies and low-fat dip – and fill up on those, or even consider bringing your own if it's a potluck or house party where guests are welcome to contribute.

**Practice portion control** - There's nothing wrong with sampling all your favourite festive treats, but try to stick to small portions so you can enjoy the taste without adding too many calories to your usual diet. Don't snack mindlessly – put a small amount on your plate, and stick to a single helping. Some people find it helps to use a smaller plate – this tricks your mind into thinking you have a larger portion than you do.

**Be selective** - Rather than eating every sugary treat that crosses your path, draw up a short list of your very favourite Christmas foods and give yourself permission to indulge in just those. Don't blow your calorie budget by munching your way through endless bowls of crisps and cheap sweets simply because they're there – save yourself instead for that mouth-watering homemade dessert, or your very favourite Christmas biscuits. Aim for quality over quantity, too – it's usually far more enjoyable to savour one really high-quality, decadent chocolate treat, than to eat an entire bag of chocolates.

Also avoid buying unhealthy foods to have in the house “just in case” – you'll find it that much harder to resist temptation, and are more likely to end up eating them yourself to prevent them going to waste. Fill up your fridge and cupboards with healthy ingredients so you'll be inclined to eat these instead.

**Stay hydrated** - Your brain can sometimes misinterpret feelings of dehydration as hunger, so try to stay well hydrated throughout the festive season. You probably need more water than you think at this time of year, as although it's not hot outside, central heating, alcohol and the stress of racing around getting your shopping done can all contribute to dehydration. Aim for around two litres of non-caffeinated, non-alcoholic fluid a day, and be sure to top up before meals, as the extra liquid can help you feel full and encourage you to eat less.

**Control your alcohol intake** - Increased socialising around the Christmas period usually translates into an increased alcohol intake. While it's pleasant to share a few festive drinks with family and friends, remember that not only is alcohol itself highly calorific, but the more you drink, the less inhibited you'll feel about helping yourself to that second plateful from the buffet. To help slow down your drink consumption, alternate alcoholic beverages and soft drinks, or opt for a spritzer or shandy instead of straight wine or beer. Not only will this help reduce your calorie intake, but it will also help you stay hydrated, and hopefully reduce the chances of a hangover the next day.

**Slow down and find a non-food focus** - If you're going to indulge in your favourite treats, slow down, take your time and really savour the experience. By eating more mindfully, you're more likely to pay attention to what you're consuming and stop when you've had enough. Also take the time to enjoy the non-food aspects of the season. If you're at a party, focus on catching up with friends, dancing or playing a game with the kids rather than lurking around the food table. Food is a wonderful part of the festivities, but there are many other ways to have fun and celebrate without disrupting your healthy lifestyle.

**Remember that it's not all or nothing** - Most importantly, remember that it's not a case of all or nothing at Christmas when it comes to your diet. Many people feel tempted to throw caution to the wind, eat everything they want and worry about the results when it comes time to make their New Year's resolutions. However, you're likely to feel better about yourself (and dread January less) if you take a few reasonable precautions to minimise the effects of festive indulgence. On the flip side, there's no need to deprive yourself – it is perfectly possible to indulge in some naughty festive treats without losing all control over your eating and drinking. After all, healthy living is all about balance and moderation – and Christmas is about celebration!



## Practical ways to improve your sleep

Sleep - we all do it, but nearly half of us don't do it well. Yet sleep is essential to our health and wellbeing. We function poorly when we don't get enough quality sleep and it can lead to long-term health problems.

Take a look at these five areas to make sure you're getting a good night's sleep:

1. **Bedroom** - Make sure your bed is comfortable. Your bed covers should leave you enough room to stretch and turn comfortably without becoming tangled. If you often wake up with a sore back or an aching neck, you may need to experiment with different levels of mattress firmness, foam toppers, and pillows that provide more or less support. Reserve your bed for sleeping. By not working, watching TV, or using your computer in bed, your brain will associate the bedroom with just sleep and make it easier to wind down at night.
2. **Lifestyle**- Our lifestyles are fast-paced and full of stimulation making it difficult to switch off and wind down. Try dimming the lights in your home in the evenings and stick to a regular bedtime routine. Avoid using computers or mobile phones before going to bed and don't nap after 3pm.

3. **Stress** - When a person has anxious thoughts, their heart rate goes up and the mind starts to 'race'. Instead of being calm and subdued, their brains are too aroused to sleep. Practicing relaxation techniques before bed is a great way to wind down, calm the mind, and prepare for sleep. Try:
  - Deep breathing.** Close your eyes and take deep, slow breaths, making each breath even deeper than the last.
  - Progressive muscle relaxation.** Starting with your toes, tense all the muscles as tightly as you can, then completely relax. Work your way up to the top of your head.
  - Visualizing a peaceful, restful place.** Close your eyes and imagine a place that's calming and peaceful. Concentrate on how relaxed this place makes you feel.
  
4. **Diet** - Make sure you avoid stimulants (such as alcohol, caffeine and cigarettes) before going to bed and avoid eating a large meal late at night. For some people, a light snack before bed can help promote sleep. For others, eating before bed can lead to indigestion and make sleeping more difficult. If you need a bedtime snack, try:
  - Sliced turkey
  - A small bowl of natural rolled oat's
  - Cottage cheese
  - Half a banana
  
5. **Exercise** - Exercise can lower your body temperature and help you enjoy better quality sleep. The more vigorously you exercise, the more powerful the sleep benefits. Try not to perform high intensity exercise too late in the day. Even light exercise —such as walking for just 10 minutes a day — improves sleep quality. It can take several months of regular activity before you experience the full sleep-promoting effects. So be patient and focus on building an exercise habit that sticks.

## Support over the Festive Season

Christmas can be an exciting time when people get together to celebrate, but it can be a difficult time for some people. Bolton University closes for the Christmas break, between 21 December 2016 to 7 January 2017, however AMIAN Counselling and Support Service provides all Bolton University staff, throughout the festive period, with unbiased, impartial, independent, free advice and support and is a practical and positive way to help resolve concerns and difficulties. Not all staff accessing our service require counselling, some just need the assistance from someone outside of the situation to help explore possible options and provide advice, support and information.

The service is completely confidential and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The service is available to all employees.

If you have any further questions or wish to book an appointment, please do not hesitate to contact AMIAN:

Tel: 01204 418183 / 07872 423 088

Email: [info@amianltd.co.uk](mailto:info@amianltd.co.uk)

