

AMIAN HEALTH & WELLBEING

DECEMBER 2017



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 sweeties 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 you're 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.
6. 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.



Beat the Winter Blues

Tips for a happier and healthier winter

At this time of year, as the days become darker, many of us find that we are travelling to and from work in the dark. This lack of sunlight can have a tremendous effect on us, affecting our mood, energy levels and appetite, and creating a greater need for sleep. These symptoms are typical of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a form of depression that people experience at a particular time of year or during a particular season.

Understanding the impact of daylight on your health

The human body uses light cues, such as those provided by the sun, to time certain functions. Properly timed rhythms regulate mood, sleep, wake, appetite, digestion and energy. These daily internal cycles called 'Circadian Rhythms' sometimes fall out of time, meaning an unregulated body clock, resulting in the symptoms of SAD.

Symptoms

There are a diverse range of symptoms of SAD; many are associated with a feeling of general depression - which is why it is sometimes known as the 'winter blues'. Possible SAD symptoms include:

- Lethargy, lacking in energy, unable to carry out a normal routine
- Sleep problems, finding it hard to stay awake during the day, but having disturbed nights

- Loss of libido, not interested in physical contact
- Anxiety, inability to cope
- Social problems, irritability, not wanting to see people
- Depression, feelings of gloom and despondency for no apparent reason
- Craving for carbohydrates and sweet foods, leading to weight gain

It is always important to consult your doctor if you believe you have SAD as it may be another condition.

Coping with SAD

Many people with SAD develop self-help strategies that enable them to manage the condition themselves, either on their own or with other treatment. You may find these suggestions helpful:

Make the most of natural light

We know that being outdoors throughout the winter doesn't cure SAD because people who work outside also experience SAD symptoms. However, it is still worth taking the opportunity to be exposed to natural light when possible.

Small changes – like going outdoors around midday or on bright days, wearing sunglasses a bit less (if it is safe to do so) and having pale colours within the home to reflect light – can all be useful.

Avoid stress

Many people find that they are more likely to experience stress in winter. If you find this time of year difficult, try to plan ahead to reduce your number of stressful or difficult activities during this time. Plan the more stressful events for summer where possible, particularly major ones such as changing jobs or moving home.

If you can, try to make more spare time to rest, relax or do pleasant activities in the winter. Perhaps pamper yourself physically with a massage, or learn a relaxation technique to help you unwind.

Build a support network

Think about joining a support group. Many support groups for depression will have members who experience SAD or who feel worse at certain times of the year. Sharing your experience with others who know what it's like can be very therapeutic. Your GP or local Mind should be able to advise you about groups that may be suitable for you in your area.

Knowing that you are not alone and that help is available can make SAD easier to cope with. Get as much support as possible from your family and friends. Tell them about the condition, so they know what to expect and how to help.

Exercise and eat well

Try to keep physically active during the winter. While you may not feel like it at the time, physical activity can be very effective in lifting your mood and increasing your energy levels. It doesn't have to be anything particularly strenuous – doing housework, gardening or going for a gentle walk, if you are able to, can all help. Doing something physical outside in a green space, such as the park or the countryside, has been shown to be especially helpful.

A healthy diet is also important, and you should try to balance the common SAD craving for carbohydrates, such as pasta and potatoes, with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. Some people find that taking extra vitamin B12 or a Vitamin D supplement is also helpful.

Consider using a light box

Using a light box – a specialist device containing very bright fluorescent tubes – has been found to be an effective treatment for SAD because it increases your exposure to light during the winter months. Light boxes are usually at least 10 times the intensity of household lights. They are available in different strengths and sizes – for SAD, a strength of at least 2,500 lux is recommended but many people find 10,000 lux to be most effective.

It is advisable to consult your GP before you start using a light box especially if you have an eye problem or if you are particularly sensitive to light or are (or have been) taking antidepressants or medication against epilepsy.

You can use your light box at any time of day, although it's best not to use it in the hour or so before you go to bed as the effect of the light may make it hard to sleep.



Do you suffer from migraines?

Steps you can take to help prevent them

Migraine is more than just a headache; it is the most common neurological condition. Two thirds of sufferers are women, and all sufferers are more likely to experience migraine between the ages of 20-50.

A migraine attack can last from 4 to 72 hours, with most sufferers keeping well between attacks. Non-sufferers often find it extremely difficult to understand how someone can be fine one minute and then totally debilitated the next.

What triggers an attack? It is believed that the release of serotonin from its storage sites into the bloodstream causes changes to the neurotransmitters and blood vessels in the brain, resulting in a migraine. However, exactly what prompts this chain of events is still unknown. Most people who suffer from migraine will have realised that certain circumstances sometimes act as a 'trigger', such as:

- Emotional stress - tension, depression, anger, worry

- Physical stress - over-exertion, overtiredness, tension in neck & shoulders
- Diet/Food – long gaps between meals, alcohol, certain foods such as chocolate, cheese, citrus fruits, artificial sweeteners and food additives
- Environmental – flickering or flashing lights, loud noise, intense smells
- Other – high blood pressure, eye strain, toothache, sinus problems

Understanding your migraine. The first stage of understanding your migraine is to keep a diary to try to identify your trigger factors. You may find that a pattern emerges, and by making changes to your diet and/or lifestyle, you can reduce the severity and/or frequency of your attacks. Doctors and health professionals encourage their patients to keep a diary, as it allows them to make a more accurate diagnosis, offering the most appropriate treatment for you.

What can you do to help prevent migraines? People with migraine often need to make lifestyle changes or take medication to help control their migraine. But there are steps you can take to help prevent a migraine, such as:

- Avoid triggers which you know you are sensitive to
- Eat regularly, avoid sugary snacks and include slow-release carbohydrate foods in your diet
- Drink plenty of water, at least 2 litres a day
- Maintain a regular sleep pattern
- Take regular exercise, get plenty of fresh air and practise deep breathing
- Limit your intake of drinks containing caffeine and alcohol
- Ensure that ventilation indoors is good and try to keep rooms at a constant temperature
- Avoid bright, flashing or flickering lights (e.g. fluorescent) and reflective surfaces
- Take regular breaks, especially if you are working at a computer screen or if you're carrying out repetitive tasks
- Learn relaxation techniques
- Wear sunglasses and/or a hat in bright sunlight
- Ensure that computer screens are properly adjusted and fitted with anti-glare filters

Remember migraine and headaches can be your body's way of telling you to slow down and recharge your batteries.

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, from 5.00pm on 19 December 17 to 8.45am on 2 January 2018, 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

Website: www.amianltd.co.uk

