

EAT,
DRINK
& BE...

slim?

It's party time again – but how do you enjoy all the fun without destroying all your hard work? It is possible says Helen Foster

Let's start with the good news – the average weight gain for most people over Christmas is less than half a kilo. But 14% of people pack on 2.5kg or more. One reason for this is 'all or nothing' syndrome. We think, 'I won't lose weight now, so I might as well enjoy myself and start again in January'. Then we go bonkers. The number one Christmas control rule, therefore, is 'to forget about weight loss and focus on weight maintenance,' says Dr Clare Collins, spokesperson for the Dietitians Association of Australia. 'Depending on how much you normally eat that could give you an extra 2,000-4,000kJ to play with.' After that, the key is knowing the Foodie Flashpoints that could see even those extra kilojoules being eaten up in no time. And here are the biggies....

**FOODIE FLASHPOINT:
LAST MINUTE SHOPPING TRIPS**
You're tired, hungry and it's the end of the day – no surprise that food court burgers come calling. Doctors at the University of Minnesota have found we have choice muscles and, just like normal muscles, they get fatigued with overuse (like trying to decide which top to buy your sister) so by the time you stop for food you simply can't make the best choice. 'So make the choice before you leave work and fatigue sets in,' says life coach Talane Miedaner, author of *The Secret Laws Of Attraction* (\$24.95, McGraw Hill,). And write it down. If it's in black and white, there's no debate.

➔ **FOODIE FLASHPOINT: CHRISTMAS PARTIES**

There are two really big issues to watch out for at Christmas parties – booze and buffets.

● **Make your first drink a soft one** 'Alcohol dilutes your willpower and after two drinks you don't care what you eat,' says Clare. Alternating alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks helps reduce the effect – but savvy slimmers start with the soda water. Not only does this focus the alternating idea in your mind, 'research shows we drink our first drink fastest,' says Dr Collins. Better to gulp a non-alcoholic brew than a boozy one.

● **Pick your three buffet favourites** US studies show people eating six different tastes eat 75% more food than those offered just one. Limit your variety by choosing 2-3 absolute favourites from the buffet, load up on those and fill the rest of your plate with salad or fruit.

● **Or simply stick to the 'Big Five' foods** Melbourne-based dietitian Kaye Haslam (www.dietsonwheels.com) says you can enjoy these guilt free. They are lean meats, seafood, salad, crudites/fruit sticks and dips like tzatziki or yoghurt.

● **Choose where to stand** We eat twice as much of something if we can see it, so position yourself out of the buffet eyeline. Ideally, stand by a wall. You drink more if you're nervous but British feng shui expert Michael Hanna says solid surroundings makes us feel grounded and confident.

➔ **FOODIE FLASHPOINT: BULGING CUPBOARDS**

When you're surrounded by food it can be hard not to dip in – hard, but not impossible.

● 'Remind yourself tomorrow is another day, there will always be chocolate in the world and you can always have it. You do not have to eat it all just because it's Christmas,' says Marisa Peer, author of *You Can Be Thin* (\$32.99, Little Brown)

● And when you do eat it, 'put it on a plate, sit down and enjoy it,' says Sophie Boss of Perth-based diet group Beyond Chocolate. This helps register the food as a 'meal' in your mind – something studies show makes your body more likely to naturally account for the calories, reducing your appetite later.

● Get moving. Remember, the average person gains less than half a kilo over the 12 days of Christmas. That means eating around 920kJ a day more than you burn – a 25 minute run each day will blast that.

● Keep busy at 4.34pm. California State University doctors say that's the point most of us reach for a snack, possibly because it's when post-lunch hunger kicks in.

→ FOODIE FLASHPOINT: THE BIG DAY

Stuffing yourself from dawn to dusk can see you eating 24,000kj on Christmas day – but there's no need to panic

● Focus on the main event

Eat a light breakfast and a supper – and really enjoy Christmas lunch. 'One meal, no matter how big, won't make you fat – it's what you do before and after,' says Appetite Right's Dimitra Arthur.

● Use the Palm Plan

If your family do the big roast, healthy portions will let you enjoy everything with limited damage. Scott Penn, author of *The Click Diet* (\$39.95, SP Health,) says use your hand to judge. Meat should be palm size, spuds and stuffing (together) no more than fist sized and have at least two handfuls of vegies.

● Get a smaller plate

Buffet more your family's style? 'Eat from a bread plate. It can't hold as much food so it's no problem if you go up twice,' says Scott.

● Lose 'pointless' kj

They're things you eat that don't really add to the enjoyment of your meal – but do add plenty of kj. Think skin on turkey, fat on ham, and too many sauces,' says Kaye Haslam. 'Pick one and enjoy it.'

● Hit the \$2 shop

Buy a cricket bat, frisbee, quoits etc. Get moving to burn off what you've eaten. 'We're lucky that Christmas weather allows us to get outside,' says Dr Collins.

'I can eat 48 more before I'll gain an ounce!'



FOODIE FLASHPOINT: JANUARY

'Leftovers can turn that 1kg to 2.3kg,' says Dr Collins. So, come January 2, lose the leftovers and get back on track. You don't need to crash diet. In a study at Cornell University in the US, people asked to overeat enough to see them gain 2.5kg in two weeks lost half that weight in three weeks merely by swapping back to their normal eating habits.

→ FOODIE FLASHPOINT: FAMILY GATHERINGS

Your mum cooks enough to feed an army. Here's how to handle it.

● Speak up. 'From birth your mum's main job has been to help you grow – and that role is hard to leave behind,' says psychologist Dimitra Arthur. Next time she lovingly offers you seconds, simply saying, 'Actually I'm really full already,' convinces her she's done her job and saves you feeling guilty.

● And keep saying it. 'Some people need to hear "no" over and over before it sinks it – but it will,' says Sophie Boss. To avoid sounding aggressive, Sophie suggests rehearsing different ways of saying it – "No, I'm okay" or "I'm full, so no thanks".'

● Or just say yes – but leave 4-5 bites on the plate each time. A large bite of something fattening like creamy mash or macaroni cheese contains 100kj – that's up to 500kj per meal, or 1,500kj a day.

● If it's not so much what mum serves that sees you overeating, but comments from her or other family members, stop before the biscuit bin. Now spend 30 seconds telling yourself that eating won't actually make you feel better. It seems so simple but when experts at Case Western University in the US asked people to do just that, they stopped comfort eating.