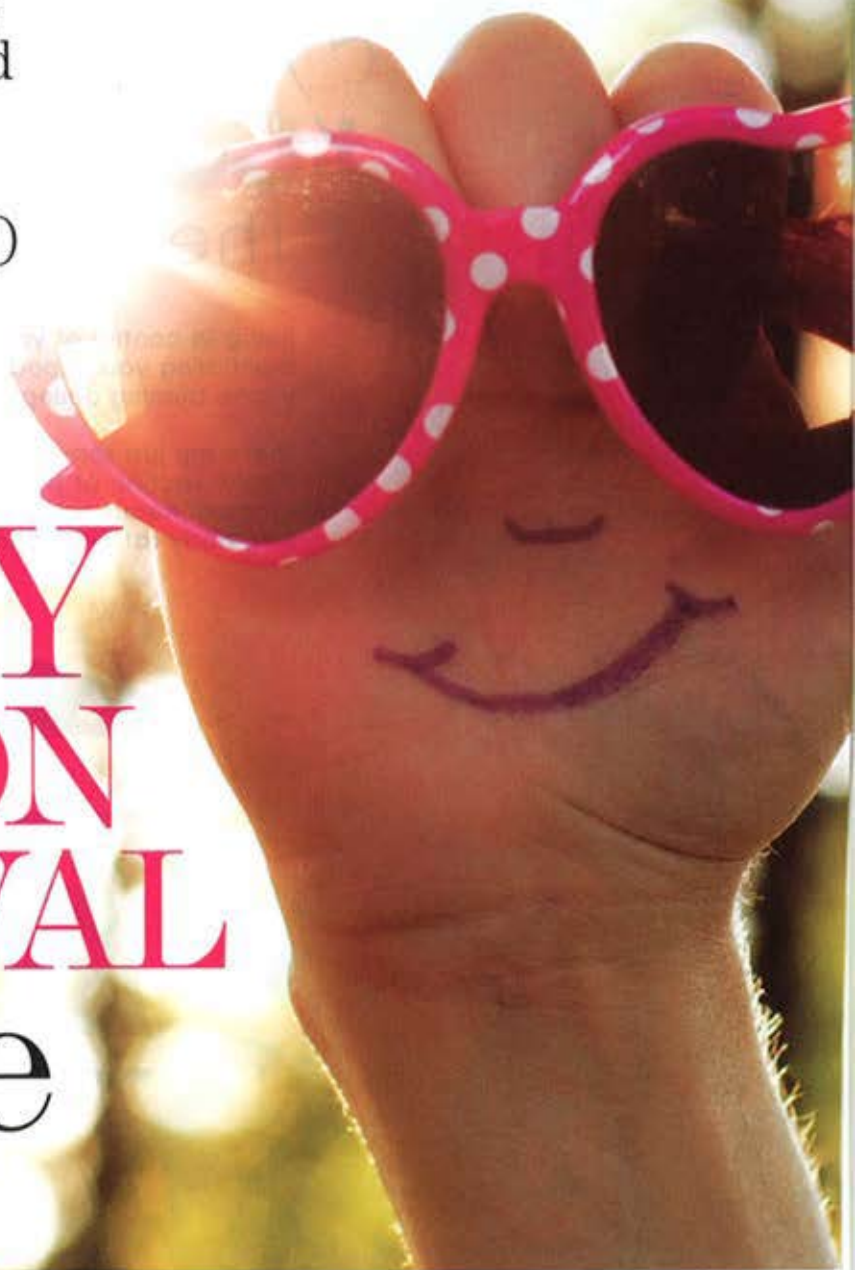


Does Christmas make you feel burnt out and exhausted? Follow these expert tips and you'll find yourself enjoying the parties again (even if you're the one hosting it!)

Your CRAZY SEASON SURVIVAL guide



As the year draws to an end and a new one awaits, many of us are looking forward to the long break... except perhaps for the celebrations that go along with it. Does your festive survival strategy usually involve strong coffee and sugary treats? Then you know you'll only end up continually feeling stuffed and guilty. But don't worry: This time round, our smart solutions will keep you well-balanced, energised and happy through the holidays.

Tap Into Your Power Source

Feeling tired? Don't beat yourself up. "Tiredness is a perfectly natural human feeling," says Charlotte Watts, nutritionist and founder of PositivelySlim.com. "In fact, it's normal to have highs and lows in mood and energy. We start the day feeling more active, and then slowly relax towards 4 pm – this is when our natural energy gradually falls as our bodies prepare for sleep."

This natural energy loop is gradual, and ruled by the release and production of hormones that govern sleepiness, wakefulness, mood and energy. "So when we repeatedly use false highs such as coffee and sugary snacks as energy boosts – in response to that 4 pm slump, for example – our bodies release sharp, unnatural bursts of energy," she relates. "This leads to a quick high, and an hour or so later, a subsequent slump – so you end up feeling worse than you did to begin with."

and low glycemic index (GI) carbohydrate foods. "Eat sweet potatoes, yams, multigrain bread and basmati rice. These will help you feel full for longer compared to short grain rice, pasta and noodles," says Jaclyn Reutens, clinical dietician at Aptima Nutrition & Sports Consultants. "Complement these with lean protein (seafood and turkey qualify), vegetables and fruits. Try to lower your sugar intake, as candies, sweetened drinks and cakes can cause slumps in energy levels." She recommends eating citrus fruits like orange, grapefruit, papaya and kiwi to boost your immunity.

"Of course, no one is asking you to skip dessert every night! Just follow a healthy diet, and your body will be able to cope with the indulgences the season has to offer," adds Charlotte.

Over time, this depletes our energy stores, so when we need them, they're not available. "You're left on a vicious cycle that I call the 'exhaustion loop'. It's a permanent rollercoaster of highs and lows, where the only way to carry on seems to be with more sugar and more coffee. This will only make you exhausted again and again," she says.

WHAT TO DO To keep your energy in check, start with a diet that's rich in whole foods like lean protein,

EAT A HIGH-FIBRE BREAKFAST

Starting the day with a fibre-rich meal fills you up and gives you energy to burn, according to a Sydney University study. It also revealed that people who ate a high-fibre, carbohydrate-rich breakfast felt fuller for longer than those who had a high-carb, low-fibre or high-fat one. They felt more alert after eating as well, and stayed on an energy high until lunchtime – possibly because high-fibre, low-GI carbs help prevent energy spikes.

WHAT TO DO Go for high-fibre foods like wholegrain cereal or fruit, and add some lean protein like skim milk, scrambled eggs, or nuts and seeds. Protein helps the body produce amino acids that promote the release of serotonin, the feel-good chemical, in the brain. It also reduces the energy swings that come from having too much coffee or sugar.

TWEAKS FOR NOT-SO-NATURAL HIGHS

If you can't live without your quick fixes, make them a little smarter

COFFEE

IF YOU MUST: "It's fine to rely on our daily cuppa for that perk-me-up. You can drink it in any style or at any time you like," says dietician Jaclyn Reutens. However, she reminds those prone to gastric ulcers not to drink on an empty stomach, as coffee can irritate the stomach lining.

COLA

IF YOU MUST: "Opt for diet or lite versions, which can give you the same caffeine kick but at just one per cent of the calories. Do not drink more than two cans a day, as cola contains phosphate which can leach calcium from your bones," she relates.

CHOCOLATE

IF YOU MUST: "Make it worthwhile," suggests Jaclyn. "Go for 70 or 86 per cent

dark chocolate, which contains higher levels of heart-friendly flavonoids and polyphenols. But chocolate in any form includes fat and sugar. So if you must have that chocolate fix, stick to 20 g or about a fifth of a bar."

INSTEAD, TRY... GREEN TEA

"It has a little caffeine to give you a bit of a boost without the other over-stimulating chemicals found in coffee," explains nutritionist Charlotte Watts.

... OR FRESHLY-SQUEEZED ORANGE OR APPLE JUICE

"They contain fructose, a different type of sugar from table sugar. They have low GI, which boosts your energy levels throughout the day. Alternatively, you can have a small serving of low-fat fruit yoghurt to give you long-lasting energy," recommends Jaclyn.

at Executive Coach International. "It also makes it easier for you to delegate or share specific tasks." Because trying to do it all by yourself is no fun.

2 "I have too many parties to host!"

TRY: CHOOSING WISELY

Only host a party if you really feel like it. "Maybe you love the theme, or you want to catch up with that group of people. When you host a party because it means something to you, you feel positive," observes Shihua. "You know you're doing too much when you are not enjoying

yourself." Also remember that a little mess comes with every party. "So don't panic over spilled drinks. Be happy your guests are making themselves at home."

3 "My guests include kids and older folk, but I want to cook healthy food."

TRY: A FISH DISH AND OTHER LIGHT ALTERNATIVES

"Steam a whole barramundi or salmon on a platter with lemon slices, coriander and a flavourful sauce. This is more

unique and healthier than the usual roast meats," shares dietician Jaclyn Reutens.

Have one or two staple dishes: For example, baked potato and pasta bolognese, or potato salad (use low-fat mayo and mustard) and garlic bread (use wholemeal baguette). "Avoid cheesy sauces or butter, and use herbs and spices for flavour. Stick to baking, grilling and roasting over deep frying."

Always have a grilled or roasted vegetable dish. "Make your salad interesting, so people would be tempted to try it. Add sun-dried tomatoes, toasted pine nuts and low-fat mozzarella cheese. Serve dressing on the side," she adds. For dessert, serve fresh fruits and iced water in a clear jug decorated with strawberries or oranges. "It looks great and it's calorie-free, unlike sugary cordial or soft drinks."

4 "How do I keep my kids out of my hair while I host?"

TRY: GETTING THEM TO HELP

Children can be great helpers – but they need very clear and simple instructions. Shihua says, "Take a minute or two to explain what you are doing. This helps them learn social and management skills as they watch you play host. You can also give them simple tasks, like wiping the table or tidying up their toys. Older children can even prepare a short performance like a song or dance." If all else fails, Fiona Walker, Principal and CEO of Julia Gabriel Education, suggests putting on a DVD to keep them occupied. (For more tips, see "Managing The Young Ones".)

4 STRESS-FREE WAYS TO BE A GREAT HOST

1 "I have trouble sleeping before my party. What if I forget something?"

TRY: A "DAILY TASK" LIST

"This kind of to-do list helps you get organised, and stops you from worrying that you might forget something," says Fu Shihua, an associate certified coach

YOUR SOOTHING SCENT KIT

"Smell affects us emotionally," says Dr Hyla Cass, co-author of *Eight Weeks To Vibrant Health* (\$26.83, from Books Kinokuniya). It's because smells go directly to the limbic system – the emotional switchboard in your brain. "To relax you or pep you up, burn essential oils in a burner or mix them with a 'carrier oil' such as almond, and use it as a massage oil."



FOR RELAXATION

Scent Solution:

Lavender, chamomile, sandalwood, marjoram



FOR A BETTER MOOD

Scent Solution:
Rose geranium, bergamot



FOR CONCENTRATION

Scent Solution:
Eucalyptus, lemon



FOR INSTANT ENERGY

Scent Solution:
Eucalyptus, clove, peppermint, cinnamon, patchouli