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WELLNESS

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Festive feasting guide

Avoid common dietary pitfalls to stay in shape during Christmas

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With Christmas just weeks away, it is time to bring out your party best and loosen your belt as you get ready for all the festive goodies that will be landing on your table soon.

But if you don't want to spend weeks and even months dieting after Christmas, some moderation is in order.

Dietician Jaclyn Reutens said that people should avoid common pitfalls if they want to avoid putting on weight during the festive period.

She said: "You can eat your favourite foods once a year. Portion size is critical. You can enjoy one to two dinner spoons of each favourite dish. That way, you get to savour enough of them without feeling guilty. Learn to appreciate that good things can come in small bites."

DIETARY MISTAKES

She advised weight-conscious diners to avoid doing the following.

1. Skipping meals

Ms Reutens said: "Many people often skip breakfast to make room for a big lunch or eat only one meal a day, especially if there is a festive dinner."

She said it was not advisable as doing so makes one famished,

which means one may overeat and consume way too many calories later.

Having a small bowl of cereal or slice of bread for breakfast will prevent you from overeating and kickstart your metabolism for the day, said Ms Reutens.

2. Starting off with aperitifs

Although deceptively small, one aperitif can pack in 150 to 200kcal. Water is a much better bet.

"In fact, you are better off eating an extra serving of roast meat or potatoes, because at least they are not empty calories," said Ms Reutens.

3. Passing up on salads

Without enough fibre in your meal, it takes longer to get full, which might result in an unbalanced meal.

4. Eating too quickly

It is a far better idea to take it slow. Do not fill up your plate at the first round. Eat slowly, then go back for more mid-sized servings if you need to.

5. Leaving out carbohydrates

Many people give potatoes, pasta and bread a miss, thinking this leaves more space for meats, said Ms Reutens.

What they don't realise is meats contain not just protein but fat too. This means that stuffing yourself

with meats accumulates fat calories more quickly.

6. Putting too much gravy on everything

Gravy is usually salty and fattening, as that is where all the meat drippings end up, said Ms Reutens.

7. Gorging on festive cookies and bite-sized cakes

Small as these may be, they contain substantial calories in every bite.

SMART SNACKING TIPS

Ms Reutens provided six ways in which one can avoid overindulging at a party.

- Avoid foods that are drenched in mayonnaise.
- Try to go for colourful canapés, as they often contain vegetables.
- Do not choose foods wrapped in pastry, for example, mini quiches, vol-a-vents and mini croissants, as they are likely to contain a lot of butter and flour.
- Drink water or sparkling water. Always hold a drink in your hand. If your hands are free, you tend to pick up foods faster.
- Pace yourself. Don't eat one bite-sized snack after another. Wait at least five to 10 minutes between



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each. Talk more during that interval.

• Scrutinise the snacks. If a snack does not look like it is worth the calories, skip it. For instance, a slice of chocolate cake may seem appetising from a distance but close up, it may look dry.

FESTIVE FOODS WITH LESS FAT

Ms Reutens recommended looking out for these foods at the table for a guilt-free Christmas.

- Roast or baked potato
- Pasta in a tomato-based sauce
- Multi-grain bread rolls
- Roast chicken or turkey with the skin removed
- Roast beef with visible fat removed
- Baked salmon or trout with herbs
- Salads with lettuce, carrots, capsicum, tomatoes
- Skinless chicken
- Brazil nuts and almond slivers
- Fresh fruit like apples, mandarins and grapes
- Foods with non-creamy dressings like lemon juice or balsamic vinaigrette
- Vegetables like steamed broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, corn and peas