




You've torn open the pressies, eaten your body weight in snack platters and taken enough happy snaps to leave the paparazzi for dead. Forget Tough Mudder, with shopping mayhem and rampaging relatives, financial stress, late nights, too much TV and over-indulging – the festive season can be the most grueling event on the calendar. It's no wonder that nearly every one of us emerges from it with a New Year's resolution of detoxing, getting fit and losing weight! Surviving these wild times, as Bear Grylls knows, is all about preparation.

Although portrayed in every shop window to be such a happy, festive time (and let's hope we can help make it so), with all the pressure on your body's physiological systems to cope with food, drink, and lack of sleep; it can also be a time of anxiety and even loneliness for some.

What you do on the big celebration day isn't your biggest problem, it's all the other days in between that will determine if your holidays are healthful. The festive season usually poses problems for those who take their nutrition and exercise seriously or even for those who just want to come out of the other side, with any luck, not worse off than when they started. Whether it's the big high calorie meals, the parties, alcohol or general lack of structure, it's easy to lose your way in December. These Survival Strategies may help minimise the festive 'damage' and help you maintain your physique and health, while still enjoying the party season.


1. FESTIVE FEASTING


Over-eating is the Achilles heel of festive season physique maintenance. Not only is it easier to eat poorly when there's large amounts of food in front of you, but you'll also be heading to places where the food is the focus. Now there's no reason not to enjoy yourself and eat well, but try to make some healthy choices; your heart, cholesterol levels, blood pressure and blood sugar will thank you for it later.


 **Avoid banking calories.** Don't cut back all day in anticipation of a big


Festive Follies Survival Strategies


meal, this will only lead to over-indulging as you're starving yourself before standing in front of a variety of high calorie food! The best pre-party food involves snacks that are high in protein and complex carbohydrates (low GI foods). This will help maintain a full feeling. It's also wise to fill up on something healthy before you go and do your grocery shopping to avoid those unhealthy impulse purchases.


 **Drink water** – lots of it. A large glass of water before you start eating can help fill up your stomach and make you feel less hungry and hopefully reduce your intake later.


 **Portion control.** Enjoy your food but don't overdo the serving sizes. Be aware of what and how much you are eating. Maintaining a level of awareness is all you need to keep your food intake in check


 **Be careful of leftovers.** Having high-calorie leftovers lying around the house will almost certainly lead to continuous high-calorie binge eating. Try giving away leftovers to guests or freezing them for another time - out of sight, out of mind.


 **Chew slowly.** Take the time to enjoy your food. Not only will it taste better, it'll also give your body more time to register itself as full.

 **Pick protein.** When choosing which dishes to have, go with the high protein options. This will make you feel full faster.

 **Ditch added sugar.** Be cautious of all the added sugar in those holiday cookies, cakes, and lollies.

 **Avoid the deep fried.** Yes, we know they can be scrumptious, but try to avoid the platters with fried, crumbed and pastry-based morsels, the trans-fatty acids will cling to your liver and arteries like an 8 year old still wanting to believe in Santa.

 **Wait before going for a second helping.** Give your body time to register what it has just consumed.

 **Know your weakness.** Most of us have a soft spot for something sweet or salty. Admitting this is important! Whatever your weakness, it might be best to not eat any at all, as stopping after you have had some, may be harder than resisting altogether.

2. FESTIVE FITNESS

Whilst festive eating may be the Achilles heel of the season, festive exercising, or lack of it, is its partner in crime.

When there are presents to buy, food to eat, and parties to attend, it can be easy to push exercise to the back of your mind. You should probably expect to train a little less, however maintaining some activity level will help your body cope with flushing out toxins and keep your serotonin (happy hormones) up!

Try and aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day.






Don't skip a strength workout.

Strength workouts will help you maintain muscle and keep your body in an anabolic state.

Similarly, due to the high levels of protein traditionally in festive meals, you may find you even gain muscle.



Exercise in the morning.

Combat the festive laziness and head to the gym or have a run/walk in the morning, get it done before you start shopping, cooking, visiting. Not only will exercising in the morning get your workout out of the way, it'll also help ensure better behaviour all day. Some studies have indicated that people who train in the morning are more likely to be active for the rest of the day and less likely to respond to pictures of tempting food.



Concentrate on your workouts.

If you're strapped for time, increase the intensity of your workouts and drop the time they take to complete. An intense 15 minute workout can be very effective and is better than no exercise at all. For example, using the skipping rope for 15 minutes burns about 190 calories.



Join in.

Family gatherings usually involve too much food and too much sitting around. Get outside and join in a game of catch or cricket with the family and kids, or take the dog for an extra long walk together. Be creative and proactive!



3. FESTIVE FIREWATER

On the positive side alcohol can contribute to having a good time, but inevitably the consequences of that may include a bad hangover, weight gain, and increased cortisol levels - a stress hormone that can reduce muscle mass but more importantly give you the 'blues'. Alcohol also acts as a diuretic, the resulting dehydration makes you feel lethargic and gives you cramps and a bad headache. Tips for dealing with alcohol include;



Drink a lot of water. Alcohol can quickly dehydrate your body. Arrive at the party well-hydrated, and try to alternate alcoholic drinks with a glass of water.



Look for some lower calorie and alcohol alternatives. Beer and wine carry large amounts of sugar and calories. There are alternatives with lower calorie beers or spirits, like whiskey, that can make a big difference in the long run. Also look for lower alcohol content - this may include beer and wine, maybe make a wine spritzer which will help reduce alcohol and calorie intake.



Eat before drinking. Alcohol on an empty stomach is a guaranteed recipe for a hangover. Not only will you feel hungrier when you have alcohol, but your resistance to overindulgence will also be weakened.



Be cautious of sugary mixers. When you're out drinking with friends it's easy to forget how many calories are in some cocktails. For example, a Long Island Iced Tea can have up to 780 calories per serving, whilst a Margarita can have up to 740 calories! Remember the mixers all have tons of sugar too, so be careful of the lemonade, Red Bull, or coke, try to choose the lowest calorie alternative, stick to a gin and tonic or vodka, fresh lime and soda.



The hangover hobble. As hard as this may be, exercise the next day will help your recovery. A brisk walk, light jog or swim will help work off those extra roast potatoes, and drinks. Getting active will also help you feel normal again, by increasing your circulation, flushing out toxins and lifting your mood. So, as soon as you feel humanly possible, think about doing some activity, even if it's just light.

FESTIVE FINAL WORDS

Don't get overwhelmed by the festive season, be positive by setting some realistic goals to help you stay on-track. This is not the time to be forging ahead with fitness gains or trying to lose weight, it's about maintenance. Factor in some rest time and a few indulgences here and there. Try marking off one or two nights a week to have an early night to ensure your body gets the rest it needs. Remember, this is also your chance to recharge for the following year. So, enjoy spending quality time with family and friends.



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