



Worried about holiday weight gain? Not for much longer. It is possible to eat, drink and be merry – without going off the rails. Nutrition editor **Emma Stirling** explains surprisingly simple ways to stay on track.

christmas without the kilos

As the old saying goes 'Christmas comes but once a year' and most people realise it's what you do in the lead-up, rather than on the big day itself, that results in weight gain. But is putting on a few extra kilos over the course of the festive season really that widespread a problem?

If you look at recent research, it appears the answer is yes. According to one US study, participants' weight gain in the six weeks leading up to Christmas was on average 2.2kg. However, those involved in the study didn't end up losing that weight over the following year, instead gaining more, with a total annual average gain of 3kg. The good news is you can avoid holiday weight – and still enjoy yourself – with a little careful planning.

Avoid liquid kilojoules

The bubbly tends to flow more freely at Christmas and this can be a real trap for weight gain. The latest alcohol guidelines from the National Health and Medical Research Council recommend two standard drinks a day for both men and women, with no more than four standard drinks on any one occasion. Be sure you look up the **POINTS** values of your favourites in advance, as only a few alcoholic beverages have nutrition information panels.

- Opt for lower kilojoule bubbly, beer and wine brands. New technology has delivered a full-bodied wine with 30 per cent less alcohol and kilojoule content. Remember that low-carb beers do not automatically equal fewer kilojoules and light beers are often the better choice, so drink wisely.
- Go easy on the pre-mixes and cocktails. Even mocktails and those labeled 'skinny' can be high in kilojoules due to added cream and fruit juice. Instead, add a little pureed peach or berries, with a splash of soda, to stretch one standard champagne into two drinks.

Small but deceiving nibbles

It only takes a few high-fat nibbles to blow your daily **POINTS** allowance. Stay satisfied with these tricks:

- Eat a healthy dinner before you party or go for smaller portion snacks and lunch on the day of a big night out.
- Focus on dancing and mingling well away from waiters and food, and clock up some bonus **POINTS** values with a few extra sessions of activity during the week.

Negotiate the buffet wisely

Neighbourhood and family get-togethers are another common holiday eating trap. Everyone is so willing to bring a dessert, dip or signature dish that there's often way too much food on offer, resulting in a fridge groaning with leftovers. Research has indicated that abundant food variety can stimulate your appetite and lead to overeating – who doesn't want to try all the new taste sensations on offer?

Here's how to negotiate the buffet table safely:

- Pick up a small dinner plate and make a mental decision to pass the table once only.
- Fill your plate with fresh, lightly dressed salads

Photo: Juicy Images

What's in that snack?

All those Christmas nibbles can really add up. Here are just a few **POINTS** values for some of the most common treats to help guide you through the holiday eating maze:

Food	POINTS values
1 large slice of Xmas cake (78g)	4½
1 shortbread (13g)	1½
1 glass of champagne (170ml)	1½
2 mini spring rolls (70g)	3
1 tbs French onion dip	1½
1 thick slice of ham (50g)	1
4 chocolate coated almonds	2
1 tbs gravy	½
1 tbs cranberry sauce	½
1 candy cane (12g)	½
1 piece of brie (30g)	3

and choose a palm-size piece of meat, fish or chicken.

- Go for lower kilojoule condiments like mint sauce, lemon and mustard over tartare sauce, sour cream and aioli.
- If you're hosting dinner, create a tasty, healthy buffet:
- Coordinate the menu and delegate plates to guests, like salads, smoked salmon or skinless barbecued chicken.
 - Limit choices to emphasise quality over quantity, for example, lean cuts of meat instead of sausages.
 - Base your desserts around fresh, seasonal fruit and ditch kilojoule-laden cakes and biscuits. Or, you can make a pavlova, swapping cream for low-fat yogurt.

Make your own gourmet gifts

Christmas is the season for giving, but it's easy to put your own twist on traditional homemade goodies.

- Create your own healthy gifts like jars of preserved lemons, herb vinegars or fresh fruit baskets.
- Swap high **POINTS** value recipes for treats such as low-kilojoule cookies or truffles. **W**

Tactics that work

- Be mindful of what's going into your body. Sit down at a table and really enjoy the meal, rather than snacking unconsciously.
- Stay on track by keeping a food diary, even on holidays.
- Wear a pedometer to monitor your exercise progress and fit in an extra session or two to earn bonus **POINTS** values.
- Avoid the creamy dips, biscuits, chips and nuts by snacking on vegetable sticks or rice crackers with salsa, hommou or tzatziki.
- Monitor your hunger signals. Don't eat just because food's there.
- While preparing for a big event like Christmas, eat mints while cooking so you're not tempted to constantly taste test.

Want regular updates and healthy eating tips? Follow nutrition editor Emma Stirling on twitter.com/EmmaStirling