

## 6 ways to stay in shape during the festive season

How does one maintain their body weight and yet indulge during this season of gluttony? Here are some tips from a doctor. -AsiaOne

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**By Dr Vanessa Phua**

It's that time of year again where festive treats abound, and the bulge gets harder to fight.

Family dinners and the endless piles of festive food over Christmas will have your digestive systems and body rhythms up in arms. How does one maintain their body weight and yet indulge during this season of gluttony?

Here are some guidelines that will help you stay in shape.

### #1: Be proactive and start now

You have to want to maintain your weight. Instead of adopting the *laissez-faire* attitude of "it can wait till after New Year's" to sort out the excess weight gain, start right now by eating healthily and being consciously aware of what you bite into.

**Remember:** For that extra 1,000 calories you consume daily, that's one kilogram of body weight gained in a week, which will take you another week to lose with diet and exercise. Your caloric expenditure should outweigh your consumption steadily over *at least* a week before you should start to see any significant weight loss.

Overindulgence resulting in panic-stricken overexercise is *not* the key to healthy weight maintenance.



Aesthetic Physician Dr Vanessa Phua says one should be proactive about weight maintenance. (Photo: Dr Vanessa Phua)

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### #2: Plan and portion

Plan what you want to eat for the entire festive week and practise portion control. You are likely to dine at the same places at this time of year, be it at your parents', in-laws' or extended family's, and the contents of the menus are likely to be known to you.

Make a list of what you intend to eat and where, and take portion control into account. You can still eat your favourite foods - but in moderation, of course. For example, opt for the fun-size chocolate bars instead of the full-size ones (fun-size Cadbury's chocolate = 79 calories, 4.5g of fat, full-size = 286 calories, 16g of fat), and skip a course if there are multiple courses. You can always opt for a healthier dessert option that is fruit based, and do avoid the heavy, creamy sauces that contribute to unnecessary calories consumed!

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### #3: Avoid the "starve-binge rollercoaster"

Don't starve yourself. When you deny yourself of food or skip meals before a party, the body thinks it is in starvation mode. It adjusts itself by over-compensating for the skipped meal when the hunger pangs strike, and you often end up eating more than you intended to.

Have a healthy pre-party snack like an apple, vegetable sticks, low fat yogurt or a hard-boiled egg, then wash it down with a large glass of water. This will fill you up so you become full faster at the party, making it easier to turn down the logcake, cookies and samosas.

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### #4: Drink in moderation

If alcohol is served, drink in moderation. Although alcohol does not contain fat, it is metabolised through the fat pathways, and any excess is converted to fat stores in the body.

One gram of alcohol contains seven calories, which is halfway between fat (9g) and carbohydrates or protein (4g). A glass of champagne, dry white or red wine (125mls) averages 110 calories. Dessert wine is almost double that at 230 calories and the worst culprits are cocktail mixes as they come packed with a mixture of alcohol and sugars. A Bloody Mary contains 115 calories, whereas a Pina Colada is 265 calories!

**Remember:** the smaller the number of mixes, the less the calories. Limit your intake to just one or two glasses of dry wine/champagne (which already adds another 220 calories) at your festive meal, and have diet drinks or sparkling water over the rest of the evening.

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## #5: Stay active

Remember to exercise and stay active during the festive week. Your body will feel like a lead weight from the fatigue, but persist in burning the excess calories.

Engage in aerobic activity, be it roller-blading, cycling, swimming or jogging, for about 30 minutes at a time at least three to four times that week. Suggest a family stroll in the park, or boogie the night away with your loved ones.

Every little amount of physical activity counts!

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## #6: Recharge and rest

Get enough rest. There is always the temptation to party into the wee hours of the morning and beyond.

Give in to your body's pleas and get plenty of rest. Fatigue can be a dangerous thing and can often act as a trigger to overeat as the body releases cortisol when sleep-deprived. This results in cravings for endorphin-inducing comfort foods, which are rich in carbohydrates and fat. The body tends to store fat when cortisol is released, hence getting sufficient sleep will help you burn more calories!

Indulge yourself a little during the festive season, bring out the bodyshapers if necessary to get yourself into that LBD, but remember to do everything in moderation!

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