



DR SCOTT WHITING

UPPER GI • BARIATRICS • GENERAL SURGERY

12 WAYS TO MANAGE THE 12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS POST BARIATRIC SURGERY



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During the leadup and over the Christmas period, it can be a challenge to manage your weight, motivation, and behaviours.

This can be due to several reasons, including:

- The “it’s Christmas... why not?” mindset
- An abundance of food, sweets, and alcohol are on offer. Often, some of these foods are only available at Christmas time and we take advantage when we can.
- Numerous parties and gatherings throughout the Christmas period
- Limited cooking facilities or food supplies if away or on holidays.



HOW DO YOU MANAGE THESE TEMPTATIONS AND MAINTAIN A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE THROUGHOUT THE CHRISTMAS PERIOD?

Preparation

Having a game plan for how you'll manage throughout the Christmas season is the key to success. If you're eating out or eating at a party, there are a few steps you can take to help monitor your food.

- Look up the menu prior
- If you know you're going out for dinner, ensure you eat well throughout the day
- If you're bringing a plate, prepare a dish that is appropriate for you to eat
- Don't arrive on an empty stomach
- Pack snacks in your bag
- Eat a small meal before you go out
- Don't try new foods on Christmas day or at a party as it's not uncommon after bariatric surgery to have gastrointestinal upset and/or food intolerances develop.

Set your boundaries

Just because it's Christmas doesn't mean that your health plan should go out the window. Below are a few tips to help you stick to a healthy lifestyle throughout the silly season.

- Set limits on alcohol
- Commit to physical activity
- Decide on your Christmas menu and stick to it
- Think about the quantity you're preparing – don't over cook
- Send your guests home with a 'doggy bag' (you don't need Christmas leftovers for a week)
- Tell your family and friends about why you've committed to a healthy Christmas lifestyle
- Christmas is one day of the year, not a week or month! Be flexible with your diet and activity on this day and get back to your routine the following day.

Eating behaviours

The same principles apply, even at Christmas!

- Eat your protein first
- Eat slowly
- Avoid having fluids and food at the same time
- No longer than 30 minutes to eat your meal and pack your food/meal away to avoid picking
- Stop when you feel 'content'.
- Limit grazing and snacking.

Hydration

With the hot Australian weather, it's easy to confuse dehydration with hunger or appetite. Make sure you've had plenty of fluids prior to your events and make it a rule to always start with a glass of water when you arrive. A few important things to remember to help post bariatric surgery include:

- Make sure you stay hydrated throughout the day – sip, sip, sip!
- Separate your food and fluids
- Don't try new drinks on the day as this can cause stomach upset
- Be mindful of liquid calories such as fruit juices, punch, alcohol, and egg nogg
- If water doesn't sit well after surgery, it may help to add diet cordial, lemon and lime wedges, or water drops (which can be carried in your bag).



Food tips

Christmas is a great time to enjoy all your favourite foods, in small serves. Here's a few ways you can enjoy Christmas lunch without skipping out on your healthy lifestyle plan.

- Start your day with a high protein breakfast
- Christmas turkey without the skin is a great lean source of protein
- Choose fruit or vegetable-based stuffing mixes rather than sausage meat and cook the stuffing separately to avoid it absorbing the fat during cooking
- Fresh seafood is great, think about including prawns or a baked whole fish – just be mindful of high fat dressings and sauces!
- Make your vegetables and salads interesting with nuts, seeds, herbs, dried cranberries, prosciutto, olive oil, dukkha, bocconcini, pomegranate, and other fruit
- Seasonal fruit salad with custard or baked stone fruit with a small serve of ice cream are excellent options for something sweet
- Limit snacking on cheeses, processed meats, chocolates, pretzels and instead opt for fruit and veggie sticks with dip.

Be mindful and aware

Being mindful of how you're feeling and what you are eating is an important part of maintaining weight loss post-surgery. Check in with yourself by asking the following questions:

- How am I feeling today?
- How is the meal I'm having?
- How can I slow down and enjoy every bite?
- How can I be more present?
- Am I snacking/grazing – Why?



Alcohol

Having a plan in place regarding your alcohol intake will help you maintain a healthy lifestyle at Christmas and beyond. It's also important to be educated, did you know that alcohol makes you dehydrated and increases your hunger? Here are a few ways to manage your alcohol consumption:

- Follow every alcoholic drink with some water
- Ensure you have eaten a nutritious meal prior to having a drink
- Opt for a lower calorie drink where possible or consider mixed drinks like champagne and orange juice, wine and soda, and non-alcoholic drinks
- You could always include non-alcoholic wine, beer, and champagne.

Physical activity

Exercise is a great way to counteract excess calories and is also a good way to reduce stress, reset, and clear your head in the lead up to Christmas. Plan to move your body more regularly if you know you won't have time over the Christmas and New Year period or if your eating habits and diet have been a little 'off track'.

- Move after your meal - play with the kids, walk, swim, backyard cricket
- Get back to your regular exercise plan as soon as possible, i.e. the next day
- Finding time can be difficult, but anything is better than nothing!



Behaviours

Getting the foundations of a healthy lifestyle in place early post-surgery will help to ensure long term success. That's why it's important to stay committed even over the Christmas period. Here are a few ways you can help stay motivated:

- Plan your menu and stick to it
- Get your sleep
- Take your multivitamins
- Ask for support
- Don't use your scales
- Put the food away once the meal is finished
- Try and maintain some routine.

Get back to your routine

It's important to remember that Christmas is a **holiday**, not a **holiweek** or a **holimonth**. Don't be concerned if your weight has fluctuated over this period. It's important to note that regaining control is empowering and shifts the control back to you and not the food.



Get off your scales

Your scales will tell you your weight, but can't tell you:

- You've gained energy
- Your clothes fit better than before
- Your blood pressure and cholesterol have improved
- Your mental health has improved
- Your fitness levels have increased
- How much water you've drunk today
- How much muscle you've gained
- You're happier and healthier!

Enjoy yourself!

- You've worked so hard to get to this point in your journey, acknowledge this and be proud. Next Christmas and the following Christmas will be that much easier because you've put in the effort this time around.
- Enjoying the festive season and avoiding weight gain is made a lot easier with a little thought and planning.
- Christmas isn't about the food, it's about people coming together, enjoying their company, and reflecting on the year that has been.
- We're not perfect! Setbacks do happen. Be mindful of this, acknowledge it and move forward but most importantly, savour the quality time with your friends and family and the food that passes our lips.





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