



Eat, drink & be merry

Yes, you can treat yourself at parties – and still keep your figure! Follow dietitian **Karen Inge's** clever guide to holiday food.

WHEN MOST OF us think of Christmas and eating, the word "overindulgence" comes to mind. It just seems like one big eat-a-thon ... non-stop eating and drinking for an entire day.

Well, I suppose, from a nutrition point of view, one day of over-consuming kilojoules is no big deal and would actually have relatively little effect on overall weight gain. For most of us, however, it's not the actual Christmas Day eating that causes woe under the mistletoe, it's the pre- and post-Christmas events that result in the kilo creep.

Yes, it all makes sense and everyone knows to choose wisely at parties, say no to high-fat, high-sugar temptations, exert caution with portions and mix up your water and wine. This festive season, though, don't worry so much about what *not* to eat. Instead, let's check out some delicious-tasting Christmas foods that are actually good for you.

GOBBLE, GOBBLE TURKEY

It's super lean and a fabulous source of high-quality protein, which is why some say turkey is too dry. Yet before you go wild with stuffing and gravies, try things such as butterflying the turkey or partly covering it with foil, to help retain the juices. Cranberry sauce can come to the rescue, too. It's low in fat and full of ruby red cranberries, and offers some assistance with urinary tract infections. Cranberries are very tart without any sugar, so keep your serves of sweet cranberry sauce in check.

SEAFOOD STARS

Oysters, prawns and crayfish are good sources of protein, which helps form the structural parts of our bodies as well as hormones, enzymes and nerves. Yet some people have been hesitant to eat prawns and crayfish because of cholesterol concerns. It's not the cholesterol in food that causes high cholesterol in our bloodstream. It's our livers making cholesterol from foods high in saturated fats which is a problem for some, so watch the creamy sauces.

It's oysters, however, which offer the most nutritionally. They are superstars in the zinc department, being the richest food source of this mineral in our diets. Zinc is involved in energy production, but its major role is in immune function, healing and sexual development.



GO NUTS

Nuts are good for us, but what about toffee-enrobed macadamias? Okay, perhaps not too many of them, as macadamias have the highest total fat content, at around 70 per cent, but only 10 per cent saturated. The rest is mainly mono-unsaturated, with a good amount of ALA Omega-3s, so nuts are fine without the choc and toffee. Research is suggesting we should eat 30g of nuts five times a week to gain heart health benefits – that's only about 15 macadamia nuts. So enjoy being a nut nibbler, but it's best to eat them raw. Visit the website nutsforlife.com.au to find out more about your favourite nut.



AMAZING AVOCADOS

Avocados are rich in magnesium, essential for healthy bones and the cardiovascular system, and it plays a role in blood sugar regulation. They are also rich in potassium, which helps regulate blood pressure, and are a source of folate, important for protecting our DNA.

The healthy fats in avocado can improve the body's ability to absorb nutrients from food, in particular the fat-soluble vitamins and phytonutrients. A study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* by Dr Steven Schwartz has shown that adding about half an avocado (75g) to a carrot/lettuce/spinach salad increases the absorption of the fat-soluble, anti-oxidant nutrients from four to 13 times, compared with the absorption rate of the same salad without the avocado.



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MERRY BERRIES AND CHERRIES

Berries and cherries are in abundance now and burst with goodness in a summer pudding. Their colour is due to the anthocyanin compounds, anti-oxidants known to reduce inflammation.

There has been much research looking at the benefits of berries in improving brain function, particularly in Alzheimer-induced mice, but more recent research has looked at cherries having an anti-inflammatory effect for arthritic pain.

A study by University of Michigan researchers revealed a cherry-enriched diet reduced inflammation markers in animals by up to 50 per cent. Studies suggest the anti-oxidants in cherries may help reduce levels of nitric oxide, a compound associated with osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. Sour cherries, the Morello variety, appear to have greater reported health benefits.

Cherries are also a natural source of melatonin, a neurohormone that has long been linked to sleep. So, according to the latest findings, to reduce jet lag or to get to sleep on the plane, have a serve of cherries (1 serve equals ½ cup dried cherries or 1 cup fresh cherries), one hour before your desired sleep time.



MANGO MAGIC

This delicious summer fruit that just seems to belong in the frozen daiquiri in your hand as you loll about poolside can also be enjoyed dripping down your chin over the kitchen sink. According to Professor Jennie Brand-Miller, who has written many books on the glycaemic index, mangoes are the only tropical fruits with a low GI (51), so they give you more sustained energy. Their magic, however, comes from one of the anti-oxidant compounds found in mangoes, called beta-cryptoxanthin, which helps prevent free radicals that can damage your cells and DNA. Beta-cryptoxanthin also appears to reduce the risk of lung and colon cancer. A prospective study of more than 60,000 Chinese men and women, aged between 45 and 74, found a risk reduction of between 15 and 40 per cent in lung cancer in people who consumed the highest amount of beta-cryptoxanthin.



SUPER SALAD LEAVES

There are some foods that make you feel healthier simply by eating them. A perfect example is a salad. Go for the darker leaves, such as baby spinach, radicchio and rocket, and you'll be feasting on folate, the B vitamin that may help counteract some of the negative effects of alcohol.

There have been reports that if heavy drinkers had a good folate intake their risk of breast cancer would be reduced. Yet before you pop the champagne cork and wash the spinach leaves, there is still no consensus on this and no recommendations for how much folate is needed. Since oranges are also a source of folate, a glass of champers and orange juice might just do the trick for now.



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CREAMY YOGURT By the time you get to dessert on Christmas Day, most of us no longer care about the kilojoules and fat because, let's face it, the desserts are simply too tempting to resist. Yet you don't need to miss out. Just forgo the double cream (at 48 per cent fat), crème fraîche (between 35 and 48 per cent), regular cream (40 per cent), thickened cream (38 per cent), or reduced cream (18 per cent fat), and bring on the creamy custard yogurt (6 per cent fat) or a creamy yogurt (5 per cent fat). You'll be getting all the calcium, too, but no, that doesn't mean a second serve of pudding.

