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How to stay ahead of the Christmas weight-gain game

Jenny Lee , Vancouver Sun

Janice McAuley, 42, has worked hard to lose weight all year -- she's down 77 pounds and counting -- but December has her worried.

Not only will the Vancouver facilities manager attend many treat-laden Christmas parties, it's her job to plan them too, and she's already up to her eyeballs in menu planning.

It's a dieter's nightmare, she says.

Pick your favourite indulgences at holiday parties. If you love shortbread cookies have them at some holiday parties, but not at others to cut back on calories.

National Post

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"The seafood station, baron of beef, fresh pasta, samosas, spring rolls, desserts, the late night buffet -- they feed us all night. The menu is two pages long!"

Can't she just order veggie plates for everyone?

"I couldn't even imagine the mutiny," she says, laughing. "That's one of those nights I'm absolutely worried sick about."

For many of us, December might as well be a synonym for weight gain. Time is short, stress is high, time for fitness plummets and partying is intense.

But why wait for the bleak, dark days of January to roll guiltily toward the gym? We spoke to a dietitian and some fitness and weight-loss experts to learn how to combat the Christmas bulge before it even gets going:

1. Don't starve yourself before a party.

"That usually backfires," says Sandy Ennis, Weight Watchers B.C. member services manager. "It's just too hard to have self-control when you're hungry."

At the same time, skipping a meal makes the body think it's in starvation mode, says registered dietitian Gloria Tsang, Dietitians of Canada representative. When the next meal comes along, you will tend to eat more.

Instead, have a pre-party snack so you won't arrive starving and head straight for the appetizers. Ennis suggests a light but healthy breakfast such as multi-grain toast and a poached egg, vegetable soup, fruit and low-fat yogurt for lunch, and a pre-party snack of veggie sticks, banana or a hard-cooked egg.

2. Pick the best.

"Pick your favourite indulgences," Ennis says.

"If your favourite is shortbread cookies and you think they'll be at every party, which party are you going to have them at?"

It only takes 500 extra calories every day for a week to gain a pound. There are 500 calories in a couple of Nanaimo bars or three or four shortbread cookies.

3. Make a plan.

Are you looking to maintain your weight or perhaps to maintain your exercise routine over the holidays?

Write down a step-by-step plan for how you will make it through the holidays, Ennis suggests. What's happening for the week? Which days will you indulge and which days not?"

4. Tune up your family traditions.

Get some physical activity into the mix. Make it fun and keep it simple, says Bev Siver, ProMOTION Plus executive director.

Bundle everyone up and check out the best Christmas lights in your neighbourhood, suggests Jeff Doyle, B.C. Recreation and Parks Association fitness program manager. How about a game of Twister or charades after dinner? One person in the family needs to be the leader, Siver says. Will that be you?

4. Go for momentum.

Exercise just gets easier and easier with momentum. Start the ball rolling now and not only will you see substantial results by Christmas, you'll be way ahead of the curve in January, Doyle says.

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