

# Four ways to avoid gaining weight over the festive period—but also why you shouldn't fret about it too much

December 22 2022, by Lindsay Jaacks

---



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

This holiday season, as COVID restrictions have eased around the world, we have the chance to break bread together again with friends and family. For some people, however, the festive period comes with anxiety about gaining weight.

Popular media articles often cite [a study of 195 adults](#) published more than 20 years ago which found that participants gained, on average, 0.5kg during the holidays. But the range of weight change was wide, from losing 9.3kg to gaining 8kg.

A more [recent study](#) looked at Christmas weight gain in about 1,000 participants of a weight loss trial in the UK, Denmark and Portugal. They found weight increased, on average, by 1.35% in December. The participants' weight then decreased between January and March but stayed 0.35% higher than the pre-Christmas weight. These findings suggest that it's a good idea to adopt some changes during the holidays to help avoid weight gain in the long run.

Here are four tips:

## 1. Eat mindfully

Mindful eating is eating slowly, without distractions like a phone or TV. It involves engaging all of your senses by noticing the way the food looks, smells and tastes, and recognizing physical hunger and satiety (fullness) cues.

It takes your brain [up to 20 minutes](#) to recognize that you're full. By slowing down when we eat, [mindful eating](#) helps prevent eating beyond the point of fullness—or even to the point of discomfort.

If you do end up eating more than your fill at a meal over the holidays, don't worry about it. You aren't going to have long-term weight gain from just a couple of big meals. Worry less about these couple of meals and instead focus on long-term eating habits.

## 2. Avoid eating ultra-processed foods

These are pre-packaged foods and beverages that tend to have more than five ingredients, some of which you may struggle to pronounce. Many so-called diet foods such as flavored low-fat yogurts and high-protein meal-replacement bars fall into this category. Ultra-processed foods are made to make it hard for us to control how much we eat.

Evidence from [a randomized controlled trial](#) in which 20 [young adults](#) were fed, in random order for two weeks, an ultra-processed diet or an unprocessed diet matched to have about the same [nutrient content](#), showed that the same people consume about 500 calories more when they are on the ultra-processed diet. The same people gained 0.9kg during the ultra-processed diet and lost 0.9kg during the unprocessed diet.

Another possible mechanism through which ultra-processed foods can affect your weight is increased exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals. These chemicals are associated with weight gain. One category of endocrine-disrupting chemicals, phthalates, is used in food packaging. [Studies have shown](#) that people who consume more ultra-processed foods have higher levels of exposure to phthalates. So this [holiday season](#), aim to cook more at home from unprocessed or less-processed foods.

### **3. Get outside and move every day**

While exercise is not very effective for weight loss, it is quite effective for [avoiding weight gain](#). Aim for 10,000 steps a day throughout the [holiday](#) season. As the days are getting shorter, getting outside for a walking meeting or phone call, or to meet with friends or family, can also promote mental well-being.

### **4. If you drink, do so in moderation**

[Studies show](#) that light-to-moderate alcohol intake is not associated with weight gain while heavy drinking is. [Men and women are advised](#) to not regularly drink more than 14 units a week. A 175ml glass of wine or a pint of beer is two units. Alternating [alcoholic drinks](#) with a glass of water can help reduce the amount you drink and also prevent you from becoming dehydrated.

We've all had a tough couple of years. The holiday season is not the time to be anxious about [weight gain](#). After all, stress may play an important role in overeating.

Make your resolution this holiday season and into the new year to develop a new, positive relationship with food instead. Mindfully eating wholefoods helps us to gain an appreciation for how food can bring us together and nourish our bodies. And in doing so, it can also help us avoid putting on [weight](#).

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Four ways to avoid gaining weight over the festive period—but also why you shouldn't fret about it too much (2022, December 22) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-12-ways-gaining-weight-festive-periodbut.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--