

Five ways to avoid weight gain and save money on food this Christmas

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As Christmas approaches, so does the challenge of healthy eating and maintaining weight-related goals. The season's many social gatherings can easily tempt us to indulge in calorie-rich food and celebratory

drinks. It's why we typically [gain weight](#) over Christmas and then struggle to take it off for the [remainder of the year](#).

Christmas 2023 is also exacerbating cost-of-living pressures, prompting some to rethink their [food choices](#). Throughout the year, [71% of Australians](#)—or 14.2 million people—[adapted](#) their eating behavior in response to rising costs.

Fortunately, there are some simple, science-backed hacks for the festive season to help you celebrate with the food traditions you love without impacting your healthy eating habits, weight, or hip pocket.

1. Fill up on healthy pre-party snacks before heading out

If your [festive season](#) is filled with end-of-year parties likely to tempt you to fill up on finger foods and meals high in fat, salt, and sugar and low in nutritional value, have a healthy pre-event snack before you head out.

[Research](#) shows carefully selected snack foods can impact satiety (feelings of fullness after eating), potentially reducing the calories you eat later. High-protein, high-fiber snack foods have the strongest effect: because they take longer to digest, our hunger is satisfied for longer.

So enjoy a handful of nuts, a tub of yogurt, or a serving of hummus with veggie sticks before you head out to help keep your healthy eating plan on track.

2. Skip the low-carb drinks and enjoy your favorites in moderation

Despite the marketing promises, low-carb alcoholic drinks [aren't better for our health or waistlines](#).

Many low-carb options have a similar amount of carbohydrates as regular options but lull us into thinking they're better, so we drink more. A [survey](#) found 15% of low-carb beer drinkers drank more beer than they usually would because they believed it was healthier for them.

A typical lager or ale will contain less than 1.5 grams of carbohydrate per 100 ml while the "lower-carb" variety can range anywhere from 0.5 grams to 2.0 grams. The calories in drinks come from the alcohol itself, not the carbohydrate content.

Next time you go to order, think about the quantity of alcohol you're drinking rather than the carbs. Make sure you sip lots of water in between drinks to stay hydrated, too.

3. Don't skimp on healthy food for Christmas Day. It's actually cheaper

There's a perception that healthy eating is more expensive. But studies show this is a misconception. A [recent analysis](#) in Victoria, for example, found following the Australian Dietary Guidelines cost the average family A\$156 less a fortnight than the cost of the average diet, which incorporates packaged processed foods and alcohol.

So when you're planning your Christmas Day meal, give the pre-prepared, processed [food](#) a miss and swap in healthier ingredients:

- swap the heavy, salted ham for leaner and lighter meats such as fresh seafood. Some seafood, such as prawns, is also tipped to be cheaper this year thanks to [favorable weather conditions](#) boosting

local supplies

- for side dishes, opt for fresh salads incorporating seasonal ingredients such as mango, watermelon, peach, cucumber and tomatoes. This will save you money and ensure you're eating foods when they're freshest and most flavorful
- if you're roasting veggies, use healthier cooking oils like olive as opposed to [vegetable oil](#), and use flavourful herbs instead of salt
- if there's an out-of-season vegetable you want to include, look for frozen and canned substitutes. They're cheaper, and [just as nutritious](#) and tasty because the produce is usually frozen or canned at its best. Watch the sodium content of canned foods, though, and give them a quick rinse to remove any salty water
- give store-bought sauces and dressings a miss, making your own from scratch using fresh ingredients.

4. Plan your Christmas food shop with military precision

Before heading to the supermarket to shop for your Christmas Day meal, create a detailed meal plan and shopping list, and don't forget to check your pantry and fridge for things you already have.

[Eating beforehand](#) and shopping with a plan in hand means you'll only buy what you need and [avoid impulse purchasing](#).

When you're shopping, price check everything. Comparing the cost per 100 grams is the most effective way to save money and get the best value. Check prices on products sold in different ways and places, too, such as nuts you scoop yourself versus prepacked options.

5. Don't skip breakfast on Christmas Day

We've all been tempted to skip or have a small breakfast on Christmas morning to "save" the calories for later. But this plan will fail when you sit down at lunch hungry and find yourself eating far more calories than you'd "saved" for.

[Research](#) shows a low-calorie or small breakfast leads to increased feelings of hunger, specifically appetite for sweets, across the course of the day.

What you eat for breakfast on Christmas morning is just as important too—choosing the right foods will help you manage your appetite and avoid the temptation to overindulge later in the day.

[Studies](#) show a breakfast containing protein-rich foods, such as eggs, will leave us feeling fuller for longer.

So before you head out to the Christmas lunch, have a large, nutritionally balanced breakfast, such as eggs on wholegrain toast with avocado.

At the Boden Group, Charles Perkins Center, we are studying the science of obesity and running clinical trials for weight loss. You can [register here](#) to express your interest.

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