

Winter-proof your weight loss

Winter may be here, but that doesn't mean you have to put your slimming plans on hold. These simple strategies will help you look and feel great in the run-up to Christmas and beyond.

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The nights are drawing in, there's a chill in the air, and the countdown to Christmas has begun. Suddenly, losing weight feels a lot harder. It's not your imagination – experts say that we're naturally programmed to 'hibernate' in winter, to be less active and store body fat. Throw Christmas parties into the mix, and it's easy to see why the scales can tip the wrong way at this time of year. But there's no need to put your weight-loss plans on hold until spring, says Slimming World nutritionist Dr Jacquie Lavin. 'In fact, winter can be a great time of year to set a new goal – maybe you want to be a dress size smaller for a big party, or you want to be a stone lighter by January 1.' We've highlighted the culprits that can lead to winter weight gain and asked the experts for tips and tricks to help you avoid them this year.

WINTER WOE

You get body amnesia

Tempting as it is to live in that thick fleece all winter, wearing bulky, baggy clothes can make you over-eat, says life makeover coach and celebrity stylist Ceril Campbell (www.cerilcampbell.com). 'It's no coincidence that women who live in hot climates – like Australia or California – and wear revealing clothes all year long, tend to be slimmer. When your body's on show, you've got constant motivation to eat healthily. The worst thing you can wear in winter is bulky, thick knits – you'll not only lose touch with your body, you'll also feel bigger and less attractive and that can be very discouraging when you're trying to lose weight.'

Seasonal solutions

Invest in some pretty thermal undies instead, says Ceril, then add thin layers. 'Look for clothes that skim your silhouette – a cashmere or fine-wool jumper with a boat neckline shows off collar bones beautifully. It's an ultra-flattering shape if you're pear-shaped. Add a fine-knit cardie in the same colour.'

Choosing bright and light shades on drab days can also really lift your mood, says colour consultant Jules Standish (www.colourconsultancy.co.uk). 'If your typical winter wardrobe consists of dark or neutral-coloured clothes, adding a soft scarf in a bright colour can make a huge difference to the way you look and feel, and it's easier to eat healthily when you're feeling good about yourself,' she says. 'Turquoise can be very uplifting – it's »



« the colour of communication; red gives you an energy boost; fuchsia pink is feminine and ultra-flattering to pale skin tones; and orange is the colour of joy and works well with chocolate brown or beige.’

And don't let your exfoliator and moisturiser gather dust over winter – keeping up with your body-care regime will also help your weight-loss journey, says Dr Jacquie Lavin. ‘Looking good is a great self-confidence booster and it can help motivate you to reach your goals.’

WINTER WOE

Your ‘get-up-and-go’ has gone

Throwing open the curtains to find a beautiful summer morning puts everyone in a good mood, so it's no surprise that day after day of dark, dreary weather can

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get us down. And a knock-on effect can be weight gain, says Sue Pavlovich, spokesperson for SADA, the seasonal affective disorder charity (www.sada.org.uk). ‘We're not exactly sure why, but lack of light seems to affect the functioning of the hypothalamus, a small area of the brain that produces hormones that relate to hunger. Lack of light also reduces the production of cortisol, the “get-up-and-go” hormone in the morning, which is why so many of us find it hard to get out of bed on winter mornings.’ It's thought that 17% of the population suffers from some form of the ‘winter blues’, and a further seven per cent experiences severe depression at this time of year. ‘One of the most common symptoms is very strong cravings for carbohydrate-based foods,’ says Sue, ‘and you may also have less energy for being active and exercising. The combined effect can lead to winter weight gain.’

Seasonal solutions

Sue recommends dealing with cravings by cooking ahead and always having a healthy carbohydrate dish on hand. ‘But the best thing you can do is to get out for a brisk walk every day; the exercise and the regular exposure to light both help.’

At work, sit by a window or invest in a light-box (the new Lumie Zip is small and portable, £125, www.lumie.com). ‘The key is to use it first thing in the morning but you don't have to sit and stare at it – I have mine on while I'm eating my breakfast,’ says Sue.

WINTER WOE

You go off fruit and veg

Do you happily tuck into fresh, colourful salads on summer days, but find yourself fantasising about cheesy pasta bakes and steamed puddings with custard in winter? ‘Carbohydrate-based foods are natural comfort foods – they tend to be warming and filling and many of us associate them with comforting times from our childhood,’ says Dr Jacquie Lavin.

Seasonal solutions

‘With a few tweaks, your favourite comfort foods don't have to be high in calories,’ says Dr Jacquie Lavin. The key is to make some clever swaps – add fat-free fromage frais to mashed potato instead of butter, for instance, or make shepherd's pie with lean mince, and add lots of vegetables, like diced carrots, mushrooms and peas. ‘The ultimate comfort food for many of us is a chip butty, which you can make with Slimming World chips and a Healthy Extra portion of bread.’

A bowl of hot vegetable soup is a great, low-Syn and comforting food when you come in from the cold, and it will also help you get your five-a-day. See our feature on page 74 for recipe ideas. ‘Risottos are also a good option – pumpkin risotto feels indulgent and is a healthy choice without loads of cheese or butter,’ says Dr Jacquie Lavin. And remember, a diet rich in fruit and veg will help keep your immune system fighting fit against any winter bugs.

WINTER WOE

You go into hibernation

It's easy to spend every weekend and evening curled up on the sofa, feeling lethargic and wondering if regular trips to the biscuit barrel count as exercise. However, the less active you are, the less energy you have, says top personal trainer Kathryn Freeland (www.absolutefitness.co.uk), and the more tempted you are to snack on unhealthy foods.

Seasonal solutions

‘Exercise has a direct effect on mood, plus, it gets your blood pumping around your body and your metabolism fired up, so the fitter you are, the more calories you burn on a daily basis,’ says Kathryn.

Her top tip for sticking at exercise is to get your friends involved. ‘Make a weekly or twice-weekly date to meet at an exercise class, go for a walk or jog, or do an exercise DVD together. You're less likely to skip a session if you know you'll be letting your friends down.’

If you are going to head outdoors, invest in some proper kit. ‘Just wear two or three light layers and a



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good waterproof and windproof jacket,’ says Kathryn (try TK Maxx for a good selection of cut-price exercise wear). If exercising at home is something that works best for you, invest in some fitness DVDs. ‘Doing the same exercise DVD over and over again gets boring, so buy a few – you can get them secondhand quite cheaply from www.amazon.co.uk – and vary them,’ she says. Alternatively, you may be able to borrow some from your local library. ‘Put your exercise kit on and do the DVD first thing in the morning – leave it until later and chances are something will come up to stop you from doing it.’

And if you usually sign up for an evening class at this time of year, it’s a good idea to make it an active

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one. ‘Ballroom, ceroc and salsa classes are springing up everywhere and they’re a great way of socialising as well as getting fit,’ says Kathryn. And the golden rule to remember when it comes to exercise is that every little bit you do really does help, says Kathryn.

‘Squeeze in a burst of activity wherever you can – walking upstairs or to the shops and back on a regular basis really will make a difference,’ she says. ‘In one study from California State University, people who did a brisk 10-minute walk raised their energy levels for up to two hours afterwards.’ To find out more about building your activity levels up in small achievable steps, speak to your Consultant at group about Slimming World’s Body Magic programme.

WINTER WOE

You get into the festive spirit

Do you find it hard to say no when someone offers you a glass of mulled wine and a mince pie? Although Christmas is only one day of the year and Christmas dinner itself, with all those vegetables and lean turkey, can be a healthy meal, it’s the run-up to the big day that many of us find tricky, says Dr Jacquie Lavin. ‘It can be challenging to stick to a healthy eating plan when everyone around you seems to be tucking in.’

Seasonal solutions

Watch what you drink, says Dr Jacquie Lavin. ‘Too much alcohol and your healthy resolutions will go out the window. Alternate alcoholic drinks with water or diet soft drinks.’ The key is to keep your goal in mind and plan ahead,’ she says. If you’ve got a big night out coming up, think about how you’re going to tackle it. ‘If you know the food is going to be great and you’ll want to make the most of it, that’s fine,’ says Dr Jacquie Lavin. ‘Use flexible Syns, allocate yourself an extra amount. One day won’t make a great deal of difference to your long-term weight loss and you’ll feel in control. What’s important is to keep counting then get back on the eating plan the next day – don’t restrict yourself, just eat normally, so you don’t get into a binge-starve cycle.’

And when you do want to avoid eating too much at a party, eat before you go. Top food psychologist Dr Brian Wansink, from Cornell University in the US, recommends eating away from the buffet table, so you won’t be tempted to refill your plate before you’ve even finished eating. Jacquie also suggests offering to bring a dish to a party, and cooking a Slimming World main course or dessert for everyone to share. ‘The recipes are as delicious so no one will know the difference.’ □