



## Healthy festive feast

By Kelly Walker

Christmas dinner is traditionally a large and lavish affair. It is often seen as the one time of the year that healthy eating habits or diets are put on hold. Although the annual festive feast has a bit of a reputation for being a lard-fest some of the foods on the menu are surprisingly healthy. A few alterations may increase the nutritional value of this special meal and also reduce the total intake of calories without compromising flavour and enjoyment.

If a three course meal is planned then a hearty winter vegetable soup as a starter is ideal, it will provide an abundance of anti-oxidants and will help you feel full sooner.

An oven roast turkey provides good lean meat, trimming off the skin reduces fat intake by up to 50%. Avoid duck and goose on Christmas day as these traditional birds have a far higher saturated fat content.

Baked potatoes can be a good replacement for roast potatoes. Try baking small potatoes instead of the usual large ones. If roast potatoes are being served avoid cooking in animal fat and use an olive oil spray instead. To reduce fat and calories have a smaller helping of roast potatoes.

Seasonal vegetables such as brussels, carrots, turnips, parsnips and broccoli are great accompaniments to the turkey. Serve as many vegetables as you feel like, in fact the more the better – filling half your plate with vegetables increases fibre and anti-oxidants such as beta-carotene and sulphorophane. Anti-oxidants have a protective effect upon the body and fibre promotes good blood sugar balance and ensures you feel satisfied. Steaming vegetables preserves more vitamins, cook and serve them without salt. Try other flavourings like pepper or fresh herbs instead.

Bread sauce can be made with skimmed milk instead of whole milk to reduce fat content.

Avoid extra trimmings such as pigs in blankets and try roasting whole small red onions instead. These are rich in an anti-oxidant called quercetin and also contain pre-biotics that feed your healthy gut bacteria.

Avoid making gravy with the turkey juices and use vegetable juice from the steamer. This contains no fat and will be rich in nutrients that may have leached from the vegetables.

After the main meal has been eaten try to clear away leftovers as soon as possible, this reduces the temptation of picking at them. Putting the spare food in the freezer, dog bowl or compost pot as soon as it is cooled gets it out of the way!

Christmas pudding is naturally rich and instead of serving with rich brandy butter or cream try a small portion with natural yoghurt or custard made with semi-skimmed milk. This could reduce the fat content by almost 50%.

Alternatively a fresh fruit salad with natural yoghurt or fruit sorbet can be a refreshing dessert.

There is often the tendency to have a high amount of alcohol with Christmas dinner, this adds to the overall calories consumed. Instead of opening the wine at the beginning of the meal open a bottle of chilled water or sparkling water and open the wine at the second course. Red wine contains more anti-oxidants than white. White wines can be watered down with soda or sparkling water and alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks can be alternated. Using a small 125 ml wine glass is more beneficial than the larger ones that can hold 300ml.

In order to avoid the post Christmas bloating choose some of the healthier alternatives. This will give your digestive system a bit of a break and increase nutrients that boost good general health. This will leave you fighting fit for the New Year and reduce the need to detox in January!

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