




How to have a healthy Christmas (without ruining it)

By Sandie Fredriksson



SANDIE FREDRIKSSON is a highly sought-after health coach, teaching women over 40 her unique roadmap for more energy, glowing confidence and a healthy body. She pays particular attention to reducing her client's risk of lifestyle disease after her own breast cancer journey age 44. Sandie is also a certified expert on how to eat to support and promote health.

Excited about festive indulgence but dreading the January regret? Health coach Sandie Fredriksson shares her tips to help you keep your body and mind healthy, without missing out on the fun.

Time off work to spend with our families, an array of parties, treats everywhere - Christmas really should be the most wonderful time of the year. But it can also turn into a cycle of guilt, anxiety and regret.

It certainly used to for me. I felt obliged to accept every invitation offered without scheduling in time to take care of myself. Pedalling hard just to stay in the game - it's no wonder I felt fragile, moody and exhausted.

I also had the one goal I tell my clients no woman should ever have: the goal of perfection. I put pressure on myself to make Christmas perfect. I took on too much, refusing offers of help and never prioritising my own health or happiness. All this meant in the end, was that I couldn't wait for it to all be over.

It's only through letting go of some of the control, setting boundaries and creating space for joy and gratitude that I've genuinely started to enjoy this time of year.

I know you are about to be bombarded with an endless stream of perfect Christmas Instagram posts. But don't be fooled! They only exist amongst a truckload of real-life chaotic moments that never get documented.

I also know how tempting it can be to write off December as far as your health goals are concerned, telling yourself you'll get to that in January. But does that really make sense? Imagine starting the new year on a high from already having healthy habits in place and feeling fully charged to start the new decade.

It's not about saying no to all the parties; it's about saying yes to the best and no to the rest. Because let's face it, after forty we don't bounce back from a party quite like we used to (three-day hangover, anyone?). It's about indulging in the parts of Christmas that bring you joy, without sacrificing the habits that keep you strong.

I'm not telling you to swerve all the chocolates, only drink soda water and be in bed by 10pm. That's just not realistic, and we all deserve to wind down at this time of year. But here's how to avoid the physical and mental stress that can really ruin a good Christmas.

RIGHT NOW

The first habit you need to adopt is planning. And I mean, make planning your superpower. It will massively up your chances of conserving your energy throughout the festive season.

Start with some serious scheduling. How many nights out can you actually enjoy without ruining your week, tired or hungover? Then decide what events you really want to be at. Remember - just because you're free, doesn't mean you have to say yes. Avoid accepting last-minute invitations unless it's something you're really keen to do, in which case swap it for another night out on your calendar.

Also, make sure you schedule in your workouts. But be realistic: adapt your regular training routine if it's unlikely you can keep it up. Just don't abandon it entirely.

Plan your meals in advance around parties. When cooking dinners this month, make an extra batch to freeze: cook once, eat twice (or even thrice). Having back-up meals in your freezer will help you avoid the temptation of a takeaway when you're tired or hungover. Just don't forget to put a reminder in your calendar to defrost it!

Hot tip: To keep a steady flow of healthy food arriving at your door, secure all your online delivery slots for the month now. Use your regular weekly purchases to hold the dates and adjust each shop the day before it's due.

Another thing worth planning is your wardrobe. 'What to wear' anxiety can spoil a night out, and give your confidence a wobble if you don't feel like you're looking your best. Put together some ideas now to help avoid the stress of last-minute panic.



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THROUGHOUT DECEMBER

Everyone thinks of January as the time to start a new healthy habit, but why wait until then? Starting that habit today will give you a powerful sense of achievement. Want to start meditation? Download an app and start now. Don't drink enough water? This is the time to change that...

Hydrating is vital, whether it's a new habit or something you're already good at. Buy a water bottle you love and ditch the little crossbody bag in favour of something big enough to hold it, so you can take it everywhere. Set yourself a daily target of at least two litres a day (more if you're planning on drinking alcohol).

It's fine to up your indulgence quota at Christmas but use it wisely. Don't waste it on a buffet of fried food, grim canapes and cheap prosecco just because it's there. Get clear in advance which events in your diary will have delicious quality food on offer and make those your nights to indulge (guilt-free).

Hot tip: Never arrive hungry at a party. Eat a healthy meal before you go, or if it's an event where you plan to take advantage of the food then maybe have a little snack beforehand, so you're still not tempted to overindulge.

If there's a steady flow of cakes and treats in the office, give yourself a better chance of resisting by keeping healthy snacks in your drawer or handbag. Would a nut, raisin and chocolate chip mix hit the spot while everyone else tucks into another round of mince pies? If there's something you really can't resist, then mark it down as a guilt-free indulgence.

If someone gifts you food, don't do that thing where you convince yourself the only way to get it out of the house is to eat it. There's nothing wrong with regifting to someone else, or take it to your office and share it around.

Get plenty of sleep! You won't enjoy anything if you're constantly drained of energy. Keep a good supply of fruit and vegetables in your diet and take a Vitamin C supplement for an extra boost. All of this will support your immune system, which means more energy.

Move your body, and I mean every single day. Even if it's not your usual gym session, being consistent will help keep you on track and stop you from getting into too much of a slump. It might help to book some workouts with a friend or trainer so they can hold you accountable.

Hot tip: Create a 'movement menu' - write down a list of all the ways you like to move your body (and yes, between the sheets counts). Having a variety of go-to options, like spending twenty minutes practicing yoga, a short HiiT session or even just taking a walk should be easy to squeeze into your day. Make sure your 'movement menu' includes choices you can do from home, for those days you don't want to leave the house.

MANAGING THE 'PARTY' SEASON

December throws us more opportunities to drink than any other time of year but the first thing to remember is, you don't have to take them. Attitudes have changed. Sobriety and mindful drinking are the new sexy. And if you're thinking it, you can bet others are too. Sober curious? Check out all the delicious alcohol-free spirits out there - it could be a game-changer.

If and when you do drink, choose your drinks wisely. Avoid sugar-laden cocktails and stick to clear spirits if weight loss is your goal.

Don't let yourself be talked into the afterparty at the last minute. Book your taxi home in advance, and have a response ready for why you can't stay out late when that usual someone (because we've all got that friend) tries to talk you into it. Stay away from them if you doubt your will power!

State your boundaries ahead of time. Tell whoever you're out with if you're only planning on having one or two drinks, and stay firm if anyone tries to talk you into more. If you're there with a partner, make sure they know your plans from the start so they're not caught off guard when you decide it's time to leave.

If you know you're likely to have a hangover don't berate yourself. Instead, do your best to clear your calendar for the next morning so that you can sleep it off guilt-free.

Hot tip: Obviously the best way to avoid the head-pounding misery of a hangover is to drink moderately - or not at all. But, along with sleep, there are a few other ways to minimise the damage after a big night. My clients swear by my lemon and ginger water (lemon, grated ginger, apple cider vinegar and pepper with warm water). Also, consider including a B vitamin complex into your supplement regime (alcohol can deplete your body's B vitamins) and try coconut water for electrolytes and potassium.



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CHRISTMAS DAY

Introduce a family walk as part of your Christmas Day habit. Decide the time and route in advance and get everyone excited about it. It will re-energise you all, and make you feel better about indulging throughout the day.

Enjoy your food! Don't be too strict on yourself, or beat yourself up if you are eating things you usually avoid. But don't overindulge for the sake of it. Eat slowly. It can take 20 minutes for your gut to tell your brain that you are full

once you start eating, so leave an opportunity for that feedback loop to work. Don't carry on eating once you've stopped actually appreciating it.

Stress less. The important thing is being with the people we love - it really doesn't matter if the potatoes are burnt or someone smashes a plate.

Don't let others stress you out, either. You may be forced to spend time with people that don't make you feel good about yourself - this is where boundaries come into play again. If you know you can only cope with a few hours of your overly-critical family member, decide your limits in advance and make them known to your close family. And in the meantime, if they comment on what your teenager is wearing or the way you set the table, breathe through it. It won't be for long.

Hot tip: If you are spending the day with someone who causes you angst, have a strategy in place for when you need a break. Take the dog for a walk, or say there's a friend you want to call and wish Merry Christmas to, and take a stroll around the block. Or grab ten minutes to escape to a room to meditate - it will go a long way in terms of reducing your stress levels.

AFTER CHRISTMAS

Counter your Christmas Day indulgences by make Boxing Day healthier. Add a nutrition-packed salad to the remaining turkey rather than sticking them in a sandwich, and turn the leftover veg into a delicious soup.

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Hot tip: Make the most of that dead period between Christmas and New Year. If your commitments are out of the way now and you have a few days for yourself, don't waste them lounging around in your pyjamas eating chocolate truffles. Why not print out some healthy recipes, try a new yoga class or even detox your kitchen? Or book a session with a health coach to help you get a plan in place for more energy, glowing confidence and a healthy body you love in 2020.

To find out more about health coaching with Sandie Fredriksson, visit sandiefredriksson.com