




10 WAYS TO...

SURVIVE



PARTY SEASON



Mince pies, endless fizz, brandy butter... This time of year brings cheer, temptation and, sometimes, regret. *Anita Bean* shares strategies to navigating a healthier path



1 PLAN AHEAD

Keeping healthy-eating intentions on track when every social event centres squarely on food is tricky. In this scenario, the freezer is your friend. Get ahead and stock up with healthy meals for when those festive events ramp up. Soups (such as butternut squash, tomato or vegetable and lentil), chilli con carne, lentil shepherd's pie, veggie curry or lasagne can all be batch-cooked, then stored in freezer-safe containers for when family or friends pop round or you fancy something wholesome in between parties. See page 87 or [waitrose.com](https://www.waitrose.com) for some savvy ideas.

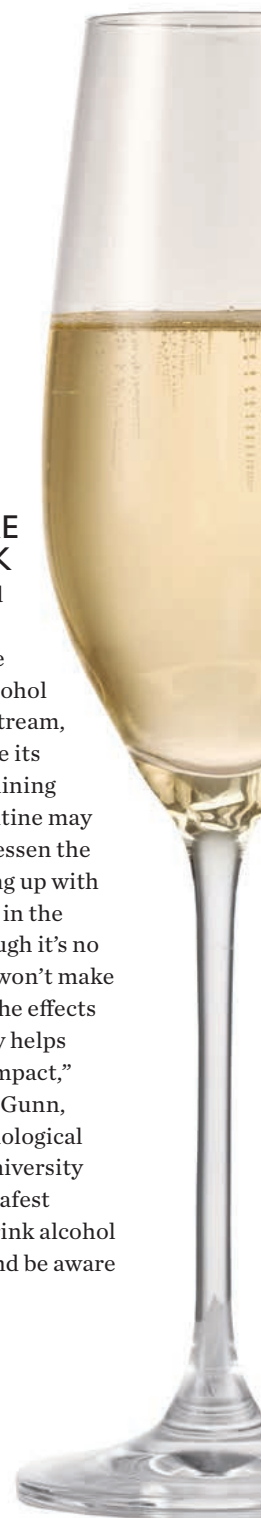
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EAT BEFORE YOU DRINK

Consuming food before drinking can help slow the absorption of alcohol into your bloodstream, which will reduce its effects. The old 'lining the stomach' routine may also prevent or lessen the chances of waking up with a pounding head in the morning – although it's no silver bullet. "It won't make you immune to the effects of alcohol; it only helps to mitigate the impact," advises Dr Craig Gunn, lecturer in psychological science at the University of Bristol. "The safest approach is to drink alcohol in moderation and be aware of your limits."



'KEEPING HEALTHY-EATING INTENTIONS ON TRACK WHEN EVERY SOCIAL EVENT CENTRES ON FOOD IS TRICKY. THE FREEZER IS YOUR FRIEND'

3

STAY HYDRATED

Taking on adequate (alcohol-free!) liquid is the ultimate secret weapon when it comes to staving off that morning-after-the-night-before feeling. "Alcohol has a diuretic effect, meaning it causes your body to lose water and can lead to dehydration, one of the main causes of hangover symptoms," warns Dr Gunn. Drink water or other non-alcoholic drinks in between the wine, beer or cocktails and your body will thank you the next day. »

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EVERYTHING IN MODERATION

Of course we all want mince pies and mulled wine – it's Christmas! But it doesn't have to be every day. If you generally follow the 80:20 rule (where you make healthier food choices 80% of the time and treat yourself the remaining 20%), try flexing from there. Yes, it's the season of indulgence, just try to pack in as much fruit, vegetables, wholegrains and nuts around it as you can.

5 CHOOSE YOUR DRINKS WISELY

Choose lighter-coloured drinks such as white wine, vodka or gin. Darker-coloured drinks (including red wine, whisky and brandy) tend to have higher concentrations of congeners (chemical compounds that form during the fermentation and ageing process), which may contribute to worse hangovers. "Ultimately, the only way to prevent a hangover is to make sure you aren't drinking more alcohol than your body can handle. Pace your alcohol consumption to allow your body time to metabolise it more effectively," says Dr Gunn.

6 NAVIGATE PARTIES LIKE A PRO If you're aiming not to overindulge, follow this plan: survey the spread, home in on a few of your favourites and stick to those. If you have a large variety on your plate, you're more likely to eat more – something called sensory-specific satiety. In a study in

Physiology & Behaviour, people ate a third more when offered sandwiches with four different fillings rather than just one.

Use the smallest plate available, chew your food slowly and savour each bite, allowing your brain to register when you're full. Take a break before deciding if you're truly hungry for seconds.

7

SLEEP Adequate shut-eye helps you cope better, maintains immunity, and allows you to better manage the demands and challenges of the festive season. "Poor sleep weakens your immunity and makes you more susceptible to picking up coughs and colds," explains sleep and performance expert Dr Sarah Gilchrist. But with late nights, drinking alcohol in the evenings or entertaining, getting enough sleep is easier said than done. "Ideally, if you can keep an element of routine, that will help. Try to get outside in natural light in the morning, limit caffeine after lunchtime and avoid consuming too much alcohol in the evenings. Alcohol disrupts sleep by decreasing REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, increasing awakenings during the night and reducing overall sleep quality, leading to fragmented and less restorative rest. A nap in the afternoon can provide a much-needed break from the festive activities and restore energy levels," advises Dr Gilchrist. »

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DON'T BE FOOLED BY HANGOVER 'CURES'

Beware the fast fix... A 2021 US study published in *Addictive Behaviours* identified no fewer than 82 hangover products that mainly consisted of ingredients such as milk thistle extract, vitamin B, vitamin C, and NAC (N-acetylcysteine). It found no good evidence to back up the idea that any of the proposed remedies actually worked. The best way to treat a hangover? Rehydrate with water. You could also add an electrolyte tablet or a pinch of salt and some sugar to your water glass – they replace lost minerals and boost blood sugar levels, helping your body get back to normal faster. You'll have saved yourself a bit of money too, as many over-the-counter 'cures' can be pricey.

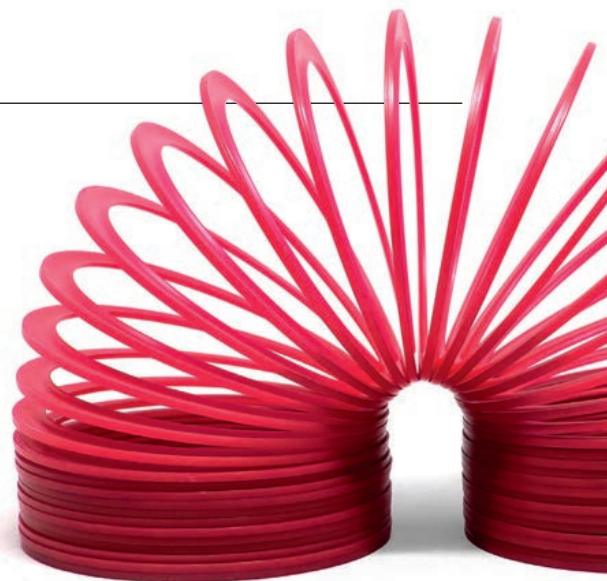
9 BREATHE DEEPLY

Meditation, deep-breathing exercises or a short break to read a book or listen to calming music can help relieve stress levels at this busy time of year. "Spend 10 minutes doing a simple breathing exercise where you inhale for a count of four seconds and exhale for six seconds. Repeat 10 times or until you begin to feel a little calmer," advises Lexie Williamson, author of *The Stretching Bible: The Ultimate Guide to Improving Fitness and Flexibility*. Forward bends, she advises, are especially calming: sit down and let your upper body fold forward, relax your head and arms, close your eyes and take a few slow, deep breaths.



HANGOVERS: WHAT CAUSES THE PAIN?

The main culprits are thought to be alcohol and its breakdown products, acetaldehyde and ethanoic acid, all three of which are toxic to the body's cells, causing inflammation and temporary changes to your immune system. Other causes include: dehydration; disturbed REM (rapid eye movement) sleep that causes you to wake up feeling less refreshed; the chemical compounds in alcohol (cogeners) and even your genes – some people are just more prone to hangovers than others. Hangover symptoms also tend to get worse as we get older because our ability to breakdown alcohol drops as we age.



10 BE FLEXIBLE

Planning on having drinks and nibbles with friends? Maybe have a lighter meal at dinnertime. Can't resist Christmas pudding? Maybe forgo the starter. Being flexible with your diet means you'll have room for some overindulgence without blowing your calorie budget. When you do overindulge, don't beat yourself up about it. Remember that one meal or treat won't make or break your overall health and wellbeing. As with so much in life, it's consistency that counts.

Anita Bean is a registered nutritionist. She has worked with the London Marathon and is the author of The Vegan Athlete's Cookbook and The Runner's Cookbook.