

# Trust in the trimmings

Over-indulgence isn't all there is to Christmas eating, says nutritionist Anita Bean. In fact, many festive foods are good for you...

**W**hen we think of Yuletide food, we tend to think of our favourite treats: the endless mince pies, the rich Christmas pud, the buttery biscuit selection box, and the bottomless glasses of mulled wine. Yes, many of these processed foods and beverages are high in sugar and saturated fat, and should be consumed in moderation. But not all traditional Christmas foods are bad for your health, or your waistline. In fact, many provide a range of health benefits, from cutting your cancer risk to lowering blood pressure and improving gut health. 'Tis the season to enjoy a few treats, of course, but you can also rest easy knowing that you can enjoy much of the Christmassy deliciousness without sacrificing nutritional value. This season, stock up on these fabulous foods.

## CHRISTMAS EVE SNACKS

### NUTS

Enjoy a bowl of nuts – ideally natural and unsalted – with your Christmas movie. Although high in fat, it's the healthy kind that can help reduce blood cholesterol levels. Eating a handful of nuts (30g) twice a week can slash your risk of heart disease by 27%, according to a Harvard University study. Almonds are high in vitamin E, magnesium and calcium, while walnuts provide omega-3s, which improve heart and brain health.



### CLEMENTINES

Not just a stocking filler, clementines, like all types of orange, are vitamin C powerhouses, with just one providing 50% of your daily needs. Vitamin C is, of course, important for healthy immunity, but it's also considered an antioxidant, which means it helps fight against free radical damage. Clementines also contain beta-carotene, a precursor to vitamin A, which promotes healthy skin. To make them into a delicious, healthy sorbet, peel, purée in a blender and freeze.



## THE MAIN EVENT

### ROAST POTATOES

They don't count towards your five-a-day but, considering they're full of fibre, vitamin C and potassium, modest portions of potatoes are definitely good for you. For the healthiest roasties, opt for olive rather than vegetable oil, as it is rich in heart-healthy monounsaturated fats, and use large new potatoes with the skins on in order to retain more of the vitamin C. Adding nutritious garlic will infuse them with flavour and help to support your immunity.

### PARSNIPS

These are packed with fibre, vitamin C, folic acid and polyacetylenes, which may have anti-cancer properties. A 100g serving provides around 15% of your daily fibre and 25% of your daily vitamin C needs. They're delicious roasted in a little olive oil, a drizzle of honey and rosemary or thyme.



### BRUSSELS SPROUTS

Sprouts have been linked to many health benefits, including reducing the risk of a variety of cancers, and boosting the gut microbiome. If you're firmly in the 'anti' camp, it's worth finding a way to enjoy them, as they're packed with vitamin C and folate, and just eight sprouts count as one of your five-a-day. To retain more nutrients and ring the changes, try shredding and stir-frying them with dried cranberries and chopped pecans instead of boiling them.

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### TURKEY

The star of the show, turkey is rich in protein and, without the skin on, low in fat, too. It's also a source of B vitamins, iron, selenium, zinc and phosphorus.



### CARROTS

There's actually a lot of truth in the adage that carrots are good for your eyes. They contain high levels of zeaxanthin, beta-carotene and lutein – nutrients that may help prevent age-related macular degeneration and cataracts. Try cutting them into thick batons, tossing them with maple syrup or honey to enhance their natural sweetness, then roasting them to intensify their flavour. Cooking them this way also means more vitamins are retained than if they were boiled. Instead of salt, try seasoning them with fresh thyme.



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### CRANBERRIES

These contain beneficial compounds called polyphenols that support overall health and may reduce blood pressure. They are also a source of vitamin C, a powerful antioxidant that may combat some of the damage caused by free radicals. Make your own sauce for maximum health benefits, although sauce bought from the supermarket still contains significant amounts of polyphenols.



### CHESTNUTS

The classic Christmas nuts (for roasting on an open fire) are low in fat and a good source of B vitamins, vitamin E, magnesium, potassium and fibre. Enjoy them scattered over Brussels sprouts or stirred into a stuffing mixture.

### CHRISTMAS PUDDING

It's unlikely you've ever thought of Christmas pud as a way to increase your fibre intake (thanks to the dried fruit it contains), but it's true. There's no getting away from the fact that it's high in sugar, however, so keep serving sizes to no more than 100g, and consider swapping the brandy cream for Greek yogurt. □



## BOXING DAY NIBBLES

### SMOKED SALMON

This is rich in omega-3 fats, which are good for brain and heart health, as well as protein and vitamin D. Pair with reduced-fat cream cheese, dill pickles and capers for a nutritious breakfast of smoked salmon bagels. For healthy canapés, top thick slices of cucumber with mashed avocado (rich in monounsaturated fats and vitamin E) and a thin slice of smoked salmon.



### DATES

Dates provide fibre, which slows the absorption of sugar into your bloodstream and keeps you feeling full, as well as beneficial nutrients such as potassium, magnesium and polyphenols. Researchers report that dates enhance the microbiome, which also helps with healthy weight management. All of this makes them a far better option (in moderation) than dipping into your usual chocolate selection box if you're after a sweet treat.

