



# **CURB YOUR** *enthusiasm*

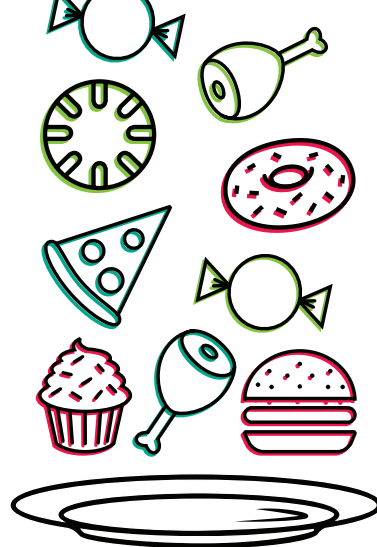
Let's face it: No one really sticks to just one drink at the holiday party or chooses salad over a side of stuffing at the annual family dinner. But it is possible to #treatyourself in a healthy way. Here's how.

BY TRALEE PEARCE

READ THIS  
BEFORE YOU  
HIT THE PARTY  
CIRCUIT!



**D**ecember can feel like a never-ending marathon punctuated by so many sprints: There are moments when you wish you could just crawl into bed, and others when you feel like you'll blink and miss out on the real fun. But don't lurch from party to buffet, suffering the drawbacks of overindulging (carb-induced bloating, party planner's anxiety, a serious shortage of sleep) without a plan. We've polled the experts for their best advice on making the most of the season without ending up irritable, achy and ready to hibernate.



#### THE TRIP UP

## OVEREATING

Cheese trays, sausage rolls, an endless supply of cookies and chocolate at the office—food is ubiquitous at this time of year. But it's a myth that the average person gains 10 pounds over the holidays—a study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* in 2000 found it's actually less than a pound. Still, you won't feel great if you eat everything in sight. Here's how to sample the bounty without feeling sluggish.

**Be a snack snob.** "It's amazing how all the little things add up," says Taylor, a spokesperson for Dietitians of Canada. So be picky. Rank seasonal treats, then "eat your favourite and skip the rest," she suggests.

**Keep eating.** After a decadent breakfast or a cookie binge, you may feel like fasting for the rest of the day. Instead, plan your next healthy snack or meal and make sure you're eating every three to four hours. "Going into a meal hungry will lead to overeating and excess calories," says Taylor. The ideal snack balances protein with carbs, so try a quarter cup of almonds alongside an apple or a tangerine.

**Have a buffet plan.** Research out of Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., has shown that, when faced with variety, most of us will overeat. "We don't want to miss out on anything," says Taylor. At your next self-serve meal, don't jump in before you've done reconnaissance. Identify the caloric fillers worth skipping, such as bread, crackers and cheese. Then, try the Eat Well Plate method: half of the plate is vegetables, a quarter is whole grains and a quarter is protein. 🍴



You know there are empty calories in Christmas candy—but don't forget the sugar in cocktails and eggnog.

#### THE TRIP UP

## Poor Food Choices

It's ironic that, during a season of overeating, we ingest fewer of the nutrients we need, as we drink high-calorie beverages instead of water and replace healthy snacks with sugary treats. And to make matters worse, falling behind on exercise can actually increase the impact of those indulgences. In a 2013 study published in *The Journal of Physiology*, researchers found that after just one week of overeating and not exercising, participants showed poor blood-sugar control and their fat cells were undergoing potentially long-term metabolic changes.

**Go for a run.** That same study showed there was one thing participants could do to mitigate the ill effects of their dietary choices: Spend 45 minutes on a treadmill daily. While more research is needed, these findings suggest

exercise does more than burn calories; it may also affect how the body metabolizes sugar.

**Write it down.** Start a food journal, not as a diet tool but as a reality check, suggests Lalita Taylor, an Edmonton-based dietitian. Writing down what you eat can help uncover patterns. If you realize you had a doughnut for breakfast and a glass of eggnog in the afternoon, skip the cheesecake at dinnertime to make room for other nutrients.

**Drink smart.** Cranberry juice, eggnog and cocktails are all major sources of sugar, so treat them the same as tiramisu or trifle. In fact, Taylor suggests pitting sugary drinks and foods against each other: Savour a glass of fine red wine and pass on dessert, or dig into a piece of pie and sip water.



#### THE TRIP UP

## Skipped Workouts

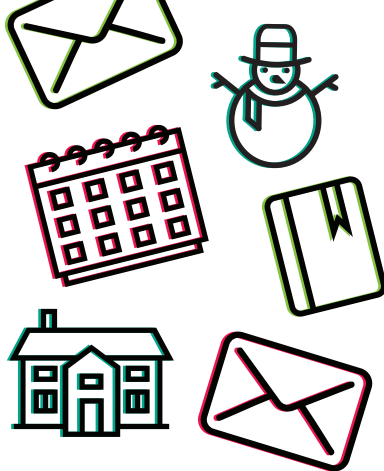
It's always tough to find time for exercise, but during the holidays, fitness can be sidelined in favour of nights out, family travel and shopping for gifts. Amanda Boldrick, manager of health and fitness at the YMCA of Central East Ontario, says the number of personal-training appointments can drop by up to 50 percent over the holidays.

### Plan for a recovery week.

If you exercise regularly, check your calendar and identify your busiest week in December. Make those seven days a gym-free recovery week, and stick to a regimen for the four to six weeks prior, suggests Boldrick. This will give your body time to rest before gearing up again, she says. Don't sit on the couch and watch Netflix, though. Boldrick encourages people to take walks and stay mobile during the recovery period.

**Get social.** While personal-training appointments drop in December, group classes hold steady, says Boldrick. Not only does working out with others motivate us, but staying social also gives our overall wellness a lift. Plus, a Spinning or yoga class takes planning out of the equation at a time when you can feel overloaded with making decisions, says Taylor.

**Shrink your workout.** Do you have four minutes to spare? Then high-intensity interval training (HIIT) is your friend. The HIIT theory is that exercisers can reap aerobic benefits from very short bursts of intense exercise. Boldrick recommends an app called Tabata Stopwatch Pro, which has an adjustable timer to steer users through 20- or 30-second intervals of squats, planks, pushups and jumping jacks.



#### THE TRIP UP

## STRESSING OUT

There's a moment when the December calendar is blissfully empty. And then it isn't. At a time when we're supposed to be enjoying friends and family, it's common to feel overwhelmed and over-scheduled, sapping the joy out of the season and leading to less healthy food choices as well as raised levels of the stress hormones cortisol and adrenalin, which are linked to chronic disease.

**Be active.** Exercise reduces stress hormones, so if you can schedule a full workout as "me" time, do. If not, find 10 minutes here and there, suggests Taylor. Walk with a buddy at work on your lunch break, and get outside to build a snowman with the kids—anything that gets you some physical activity, says Boldrick.

**Stay above the fray.** Spending time with family can come with high expectations and unhealthy tension. "If you come together out of obligation, rather than because you want to, resentment and anger is bound to come through," says Toronto family therapist Sara Dimerman. Find a way to spend a little less time with your clan, or figure out a different way to respond when triggered by a loved one.

**Edit your party plan.** It's OK to RSVP "no" to parties that you don't want to attend, and when it comes to hosting, don't feel pressured to pull off a big party. "Instead of planning the same elaborate dinner for 20, have a drop-in day event," says Dimerman.



One drink is equal to 12 oz of beer, 5 oz of wine or 1½ oz of spirits.

#### THE TRIP UP

## Too Many Cocktails

You lost track of your martini intake last night, and you're paying for it today. It goes without saying that having a dry day is a good idea, but there are other ways to bounce back and prevent long-term damage to your liver. (And the next time you imbibe, stick to the daily two-drink maximum for women.)

**Hydrate.** This one's a no-brainer, but water is the only place to start, says Taylor. Next, look for something to replenish electrolytes such as sodium, potassium and magnesium. Though she doesn't usually recommend them, in this case, Taylor says sports drinks are OK.

They'll help you rehydrate, especially if you don't like drinking water.

**Take vitamin C.** One of the byproducts of alcohol metabolism is a toxin called acetaldehyde. Vitamin C, either in juice or 500-milligram tablet form, can help neutralize its effects, which include liver damage, says Taylor.

**Eat cereal.** Unsweetened cereal is a secret weapon, says Taylor, because it can help soothe your stomach. Plus, many varieties are fortified with B vitamins, which are crucial to overall health and can be lost to a night of tipling. ♦



# SWEET CELEBRATION

A delicate, French-inspired dessert makes for an elegant finish to holiday meals. Blend up batter to create delicious crêpes and try filling them with a strawberry purée or your favourite fruit. Celebrate the season with the ultimate culinary companion, the Vitamix blender.



## CRÊPES

<b>Yield</b>	10 to 12 crêpes or 2 ½ cups (600 mL) batter
<b>Total Time</b>	21 minutes
<b>Difficulty</b>	Intermediate
<b>Ingredients</b>	
1 cup (240 mL) evaporated skim milk	
1 cup (240 mL) egg substitute or 4 large eggs	
1 Tbsp (15 mL) granulated sugar or other sweetener, to taste	
1 cup (125 g) all-purpose flour	

## DIRECTIONS

1. Place milk, egg and sweetener into the Vitamix container in the order listed and secure lid.

2. Select Variable 1.

3. Turn machine on and slowly increase speed to Variable 4 or 5.

4. Blend for 10 seconds and remove the lid plug. Add flour through the lid plug opening.

5. Blend for 10-15 seconds or until mixed.

Pour 3 Tablespoons (45 mL) of batter into hot, lightly buttered crêpe pan or 8-inch fry pan. Tilt to spread batter. Crêpe is done when set on top and lightly browned on bottom.



Plan your holiday party at [vitamix.ca/holiday-cheer](http://vitamix.ca/holiday-cheer)



## THE TRIP UP

# The Holiday Blues

It might be the most wonderful time of the year on paper, but for some of us, it can be hard to feel merry. These tips can help you battle the blues. (If your mood doesn't lift, see a doctor; you might be suffering from seasonal affective disorder or depression.)

**Consider supplements.** Vitamin D deficiency has been linked to depression. Omega-3 fatty acids and St. John's wort may be potentially beneficial "add-on" therapies, according to the Canadian Network for Mood and Anxiety Treatments. Talk to your doctor.

**Get moving.** Exercise is now an important part of treating anxiety and mild depression because it stimulates the production of endorphins, those brain chemicals that elevate mood.

**Plan ahead.** If you know you tend to feel lonely during the holidays, invite a friend to celebrate or travel with you. If being cooped up with your extended family gets you down, discuss these issues ahead of time and ask your loved ones for help, says Dimerman.

## THE TRIP UP

# LACK OF SLEEP

Maybe you stayed up college-era late at that soirée. Or you woke up at 5 a.m. to make your flight to visit family. Don't panic. Judith Davidson, a sleep researcher and clinical psychologist at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont., says a night or two of staying up too late doesn't need to wreak havoc on your system.

**Don't sleep in.** Try not to sleep in for more than an hour past your usual wake-up time, says Davidson. This, along with sticking to your usual bedtime, will help your circadian sleep-wake rhythm remain stable. Resist the urge to go to bed early, which will make it more difficult to fall asleep and could start a pattern of poor sleep.

**Take a nap.** If your first impulse is to close your eyes, you're on to something. You needn't—and shouldn't—set aside much time for it, either. For most people (not including shift workers), a nap of under 60 minutes between the hours of 1 and 4 p.m. is enough to refresh you and won't mess up your bedtime, says Davidson. ●

DON'T DWELL ON IT—RESEARCH SHOWS MOST OF US CAN FUNCTION QUITE WELL AFTER A BAD SLEEP.



# BACK ON TRACK

As the new year looms, even the most ardent holiday indulger can admit it's time to return to normal. Make it easier by taking these baby steps before December is done.

**Be the dessert boss.** Trying to give up sweets while they're still kicking around is impossible. Toss or give away extra candy and, if you're invited out, offer to make dessert so you can sub in healthy ingredients.

**Grocery shop.** Set yourself up for success by stocking the pantry with healthy foods like fruit, veggies, nuts and seeds, whole grains, nut butters and Greek yogurt.

**Refresh your breakfast.** Small dietary shifts can make a big difference, and breakfast is a great time to regain control. Try oatmeal with fruit and nuts, or a banana and almond butter in a whole wheat wrap.