**Enjoy your Christmas! **

When you’re trying to watch your weight Christmas can be a time that fills us with anxiety over how ‘good’ or ‘bad’ we are going to be with intake of calories over the festivities…. Here are a few tips that I hope will help you to enjoy Christmas to the full, without feeling guilty!

**Breakfast / brunch**

You should be hungry for breakfast half- to one hour after getting up – if you don’t feel hungry it’s probably a sign that you ate too much the night before! If that’s the case, get out for some exercise before you eat, just have water (and a cup of tea if you like) before heading out for a good brisk walk which will wake up the system and give your metabolism a boost. You might keep this habit going after Christmas and get an early morning walk in as a matter of routine! Prepare a tasty brunch when you get home, including some kind of fruit or vegetables (eg grapefruit, orange, mushrooms, tomatoes, spinach) with one or two eggs and a slice of wholemeal bread.

**Going for a walk** (or run, swim…) should be part of every day’s activities over the festive season. It’s a great way to catch up properly with family and friends without the distraction of the television! Plan to get out early in the day as it gets dark so early and try new routes or places that you don’t usually go to for a bit of novelty. Challenge yourself… set out to climb a hill or do part of a marked walk such as the East Clare Way, pack a healthy lunch and flask and off you go!

**Make soup and salad!!** Yes the same story as for the rest of the year! Always have a bowl of salad prepared in the fridge for lunch or dinner time, especially if you are short of time you really need to be ready in advance to avoid grabbing the handiest thing when you’re hungry. Turkey broth (just put the bones into a big pot, cover with water, add a quartered onion, carrot and celery stick with a few whole peppercorns and a bay leaf, bring to boil and let it simmer for an hour then strain) with finely chopped vegetables added makes a delicious soup and is a nutritious snack or addition to a meal. Make sure each meal has a vegetable and protein element to it to help fill you up and ensure a gradual release of energy for the next 3 hours. Useful proteins are lean meat, fish (smoked and tinned fish are very handy), eggs, cheese (more about cheese choices later), yoghurt and nuts (be careful with portion sizes of nuts – for example 20 almonds is about 160 calories) .

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**Christmas Dinner** with all the trimmings will tot up to around 3000 calories so the main message is to keep your portions small, serve yourself about half the amount you think you’d like – you’ll be surprised how satisfied you are! Try to include lighter choices for starters (seafood salad or a light soup such as the Courgette and almond recipe) and desserts (fresh fruit salad with a little Crème Fraiche or Greek yoghurt or a berry-laden sugar-free jelly). Take plenty of time over the meal, breaks between courses are a good idea, and enjoy!

**Party food** can be the downfall of many over the Christmas period – it’s so easy to nibble away especially when you’re having a couple of drinks – you can easily clock up the calories (eg 2oz tortilla chips and 2 glasses of wine adds up to around 500 calories) without eating a meal at all so be prepared when you’re going out: have your dinner before you go out, limit yourself to one or two drinks with water in between and don’t snack unless there are healthy alternatives. If you are entertaining you can use olives, peppadew peppers filled with low fat Philadelphia or Feta cheese, carrot, peppers, gherkins, asparagus and celery with low fat dips made from a mixture of natural yoghurt and mayonnaise with spices or cheese to add flavour – be creative! Wraps filled with salad and low fat cheese, such as Brie with a little cranberry jelly rolled, sliced into bite sized pieces and secured with cocktail sticks are another easy snack.

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**Chocolate** is part of Christmas but beware! A typical chocolate (or 10g 70-80% dark chocolate) is about 50 calories so limit your intake to one a day! You could try some of the sugar free options, like Werther’s sugar free sweets which are only 10 calories each. Protein chocolate bars can be sliced up like chocolates, for example an Atkin’s Chocolate Decadence bar cut into 10 ‘chocolates’ will be 22 calories each and have the big advantage of being high in protein and sugar free so they are more satisfying and you won’t get the sugar fix addiction!

**Cheese –** my own personal downfall! Delicious with a glass of red wine, just remember to add celery sticks to the cheeseboard so you can munch on these in between trying the different cheeses… Most cheeses are high in fat and the typical Christmas cheeses such as Cashel Blue and mature Cheddar are among the highest. Lighter choices are Brie (not the 60% fat one, just regular Brie is around 30% fat), Camembert, Goat’s cheese and Feta. Another tip is to eat the cheese but not the crackers! You tend to eat less this way as, particularly salted crackers, can be very addictive!

After the day itself, be really careful with the leftovers bonanza – if you find you are left with a lot of presents of chocolate etc, try to put them away in a place you won’t get at them easily and give them away as gifts or raffle prizes through the year. Eat your leftovers with lots of fresh vegetables, get some mange tout, peppers, baby corn, mushrooms and make a tasty stir fry with leftover turkey or try the turkey and cranberry salad recipe or a low carb wrap with turkey and homemade coleslaw…. And keep as active as you can every day!!

***Wishing you a very merry Christmas and a healthy and happy new year!***

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