

Health

Be good to your gut this Christmas

We're in the thick of Christmas breakups and with the Christmas Day feast (not to mention Boxing Day leftovers) just around the corner we're consuming more ham, turkey, Christmas cakes, alcohol and chocolate than at any other time of the year.

Lee Mason, manager of nutrition and dietetics at Castlemaine Health says that if the silly season has already got you feeling bloated and lethargic it's time to think about your gut health.

"Our gastrointestinal systems are working overtime," Lee says.

"If you don't want to spend Christmas crippled by cramps, bloating and wind, it's time to get on the good side of your gut microbiome."

Your gut microbiome, or the trillions of bacteria that live in your intestinal tract, play a critical role in our health and wellbeing.

"We have a 'help me, help you' relationship with these bacteria," Lee says.

"They really can be friend or foe and can alter in numbers and makeup rapidly, sometimes within 24 hours.

"A good gut microbiome will have you feeling energetic with a comfortable belly but Christmas overindulgence can make a real Grinch of your gut."

What we eat has a significant impact on our gut microbiome.

"We're hearing a lot about the benefits of probiotics these days," Lee says.

"Probiotics can be the bacteria in foods such as yoghurt, or fermented products such as sauerkraut and apple cider vinegar. Probiotic foods encourage more microbes to grow so they're a great thing to

include in your diet at any time of year but especially at Christmas."

If you find yourself in digestion overload over the next week, Lee suggests trying a little apple cider vinegar (1 teaspoon) in room temperature water.

What about the alcohol? Well, alcohol makes you thirsty, stimulates your appetite and relaxes your control button, so enjoy by all means but for a hangover (both food and alcohol) free Boxing Day, Lee suggests starting the Christmas festivities with a glass of still or mineral water then having water as every second drink.

Keeping yourself hydrated will also keep those good bacteria on your side.

Other top tips:

* Pace yourself. Don't overeat at Christmas lunch. Eat about as much as you would on a non-Christmas day. There'll be plenty of leftovers to enjoy in the days to come.

* Try to choose foods that are not too rich as your gut will possibly not be used to them. Have some by all means but go for small amounts.

* Try having a break between main course and dessert. A little rest before pudding will allow your digestion to catch up.

* Make sure you eat plenty of fruit and vegetables to keep those prebiotics up. Prebiotics feed and encourage those beneficial bacteria in the gut.

* Don't forget the probiotics. Try swapping the heavy cream on top of your pavlova for Greek yoghurt or have a dollop with your Christmas pud instead of custard.

And most importantly have a wonderful and safe Christmas!



Manager of nutrition and dietetics at Castlemaine Health, Lee Mason



Lee's summer icy poles

Pull out the icy pole mould for these delicious treats full of probiotic goodness. Great for Christmas Day or any time over the warm summer months. They're also a great way to use up the last of the fruit salad.

Ingredients

2 cups (500 grams) vanilla or Greek-style yoghurt
1 tsp vanilla essence or extract if using Greek Yoghurt
1.5 to 2 cups fresh, soft fruits. Berries, mango and banana are perfect but go for any fruit you like and experiment with different combinations.

Method

Option 1: Half fill the icy pole moulds with yoghurt. Blend fruit in a blender/food processor until smooth then spoon on top.

Option 2: For a creamier version mix the fruit and yoghurt together then spoon into the moulds.

Option 3: Blend the fruit and yogurt together and spoon into the moulds.

Freeze for about 5 hours or until frozen solid. When frozen, dip the moulds in cold water to loosen the icy poles.

Tip: Only fill the moulds to ¾ full whichever option you choose. Your icy poles will expand as they freeze.

Summer here we come!

Send us your questions or tips about health and wellbeing

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