

# Host a healthy Christmas

It's that time of year again; when our social calendars expand, when three desserts seems the logical way to resolve a hard decision at the buffet table and a box of Quality Street starts to look like a suitable mid morning snack.

Food is one of the best things about Christmas but too much food, or too much of certain types of food, plus alcohol and not a lot of time for exercise, can send us into the new year feeling pretty ordinary.

If you're hosting a Christmas gathering here are three (realistic) things you can do to keep it as healthy as possible:

**Break with tradition**

If you're hosting dinner on Christmas Day and you know your guests have already been to a full sit down lunch it might not be the year for the three-course dinner of roast meats and heavy side dishes.

Consider, simpler, lighter options like a grazing table of fresh salads and grilled meats or a tapas style menu with bite-sized snacks like meatballs, spicy skewers, sizzling prawns and olives.

If you're in charge of a work event in the lead up to Christmas how about a breakfast either catered or out at a local café? Start the day with lots of healthy, fresh food, plenty of good coffee and less reliance on alcohol, heavy foods and late nights.

**Keep it positive**

It's important to consider the impact our words and actions have on others, particularly children.

"People are allowed food and they are allowed to say no to foods," says Castlemaine Health dietitian Olivia Gourley.

"Christmas can be a high pressure time when comments about bodies and presumptions about health are common, as is a lot of 'fat talk' and negative messages around eating."

Try to create a positive atmosphere where food is part of the day but not all that there is to celebrate. Bring out the activities: play some cricket, go for a swim, sing a few Christmas carols. Enjoy the time with family and friends.

**Aim for balance**

Healthy eating allows for a blow out here and there but with so many events on it can be easy to slip into overeating.

"One of the biggest issues most people have over this period is that they consume too much," says Castlemaine Health dietitian Hayley Carr.

"At Christmas plates are often loaded with calorie dense foods like roast meats, gravy and creamy potatoes but light on for nutrient rich foods like crunchy salads or fresh vegetables and fruits."



Castlemaine Health dietitians Hayley Carr and Olivia Gourley

There's no reason not to have the traditional foods you love but it's a good idea to balance these with healthy options like fresh salads and vegetables. A few simple swaps can keep the calories down and boost the flavour up.

The nutrition and dietetics team at Castlemaine Health work with people from children right through to older adults across Mount Alexander Shire helping establish healthy eating habits and positive relationships with food.

If you think you or someone you care about could benefit from their support you can contact them through the Community Rehabilitation Centre on (P) 5471 3555 or (E) intake@castlemainehealth.org.au.

**Spinach and pomegranate salad**

- Ingredients**  
200g baby spinach (or 1 bunch of kale)  
1 pomegranate, seeded  
1 avocado, chopped  
1 red onion, sliced  
Handful of pumpkin seeds or sunflower kernels
- Dressing**  
1 tbsp olive oil  
1 tbsp tahini  
1 tsp apple cider vinegar  
Juice of 1 lime
- Method**  
1. Combine salad ingredients  
2. Whisk dressing ingredients together  
3. Pour dressing over salad and mix to coat.

**Healthy festive swaps**

Instead of ...	Try:	Why?
Ham	Turkey	Lower in salt and fat
Double Cream	Greek yoghurt	Reducing fat and sugar content
Pudding and custard	Pavlova with fruit	Lower in calories/kilojoules
Scalloped potatoes with butter and cream	Roast potato with olive oil and rosemary	Lower in fat and calories/kilojoules
Chips	Unsalted nuts	Lower in salt and provides healthy fats
Full strength beer	Light beer	Less calories/kilojoules
Soft drink	Infused soda/mineral water	Less calories/ kilojoules
Creamy salad dressing	Olive oil, vinaigrette, herb based dressing.	Less calories/kilojoules... more flavour.