

Health & wellbeing

Great advice to keep you happy and healthy

Q. I recently lost two stone and I'm dreading Christmas as I find the treats hard to resist. Do you have any tips to help?



Dr Bunmi Aboaba, a recovery coach specialising in food addiction, is here to help.

The secret is to have a plan. With it, you'll feel more confident and less stressed, reducing the potential to overeat.

It's so easy to go overboard with food shopping for Christmas, what with all the variety of goodies available. Make a shopping list that's

healthy and balanced, with just enough treats so that they won't be hanging around as leftovers after Christmas.

More importantly, set an intention NOT to buy the foods that could "trigger" your cravings to overeat.

If you're going to a party, have a little healthy snack before you go and set the intention to eat a small plateful of food. Also be mindful of sugary drink consumption and alcohol, as they, too, can set off a binge.

Don't let other people influence how much you eat or drink and make sure you get plenty of sleep as this reduces stress, which can trigger overeating.



In The News

Early Alert To Alzheimer's

A new test for Alzheimer's is being investigated by scientists in Germany, which claims to be able to diagnose the disease using just one drop of blood, five years before symptoms develop. It comes after scientists identified chemicals in the blood which act as warning signs for dementia.

They found that high levels of certain molecules (which influence inflammatory processes in the brain, and the brain's ability to change and adapt over time) in the blood make you much more likely to go on to develop Alzheimer's. But early detection hugely increases the chances of treatment being effective at reducing symptoms.

Time For Tea

Herbal tea can provide a refreshing alternative to ordinary tea, and according to research commissioned by the Tea Advisory Panel, some herbal infusions have beneficial impacts on health if you drink three cups a day.

Tea expert Dr Tim Bond explains: "Many herbal teas are a rich source of natural bioactive compounds, such as alkaloids, carotenoids, coumarins, flavonoids, polyacetylenes and terpenoids."

Chamomile tea – improves sleep quality and blood sugar control

Spearmint tea – improves hormone control and osteoarthritic stiffness

Lemon balm tea – reduces oxidative stress

Rosehip tea – fewer period-related cramps



Enjoy a big dollop of cranberry sauce with your Christmas lunch in the confidence that you will be boosting your intake of antioxidants which shield you from the free radical damage that can foster cancer growth.

Cranberries can also help lower levels of LDL ("bad") cholesterol and raise levels of HDL ("good") cholesterol in your blood. The vitamin C content will help support your immunity and even a small amount increases your intake of fibre, which is good for your heart as well as your digestion.



Keep track of your intake

Issues With Indigestion



Our health writer, Jackie Mitchell, looks at ways of easing the discomfort.

IT'S easy to overindulge at Christmas when you're celebrating with family and friends.

The result of all this may be an upset stomach, indigestion or what's called dyspepsia. The most common symptoms are feeling discomfort, bloating, pain, nausea, burping or burning in the upper abdominal area.

Caroline Peyton, nutritionist and gut health specialist, says, "The most common causes of indigestion are a lack of stomach acid to digest the food, eating too quickly, feeling stressed when eating and consuming too much rich or spicy food."

Indigestion may include heartburn and acid reflux. Caroline says, "This occurs when a tiny amount of stomach acid escapes back into the oesophagus (the tube linking your throat to your stomach)."

Another possibility is that you could have IBS as some of the symptoms are similar to indigestion.

"IBS is a range of symptoms linked to further down the gut in the small or large intestines. This can include cramping, bloating of the lower abdomen, diarrhoea, constipation or alternating bowel movements."

Indigestion can be avoided if you take some precautions in the build-up to Christmas. Caroline suggests starting a course of probiotics – one capsule should contain 20 billion flora of beneficial bacteria. This will help to prepare the gut for the festive season.

"Try not to overeat and take your time to eat mindfully," Caroline suggests. "By this I mean eat slowly, chew food well, sit at a table and avoid distractions such as your mobile phone or watching TV. Eating more slowly gives your stomach time to tell your brain that it is becoming full."

When drinking alcohol, try not to overdo it and try to sip fluids.

"Be careful as too much fluid can over-dilute stomach acid. Fizzy drinks can make symptoms worse."

"Also have at least a three-hour window before eating and bedtime," Caroline says.

Keeping a food diary is a good idea. By writing down the meals you eat, it will help you notice which foods may be difficult for you to digest.

"Everyone is different," Caroline adds, "so by doing this, you'll know what foods to avoid at Christmas."

If you do suffer a bout of indigestion, Caroline suggests mixing a quarter teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda in 150ml of water.

"This will help to neutralise the acidic feeling. Go for a gentle walk – sitting isn't helpful and the fresh air will make you feel better."

There are also many over-the-counter indigestion remedies you can buy, so remember to have them in stock before the Christmas period.

Caroline suggests starting a meal with some rocket, chicory or endive "as bitter foods can help stimulate stomach acid and bile to aid digestion. Ginger grated into a small glass of hot water with or without sliced lemon is also beneficial."

Do contact your doctor if you often feel sick, are unintentionally losing weight or see blood in your stools.

For more information, visit www.peytonprinciples.com. ■

Soothing Scar Gel

If a recent scar is causing itchiness, redness or discomfort, certain creams and gels can provide relief.

Kelo-cote scar gel is used by health professionals and cosmetic surgeons to help prevent keloid scarring. It can also improve the appearance of existing scars, while maintaining elasticity of your skin and protecting against UV light (important because scars don't contain the pigment melanin, which protects your skin from UV radiation).

Kelo-cote UV scar gel is £31.50 for 15g from Boots and Superdrug.



Throw Yourself Into The Festive Spirit

Properly immersing yourself in all the rituals of the festive season (carol singing, sitting down to the Queen's speech, gift giving and receiving, meals with family and friends) can be very good for your mental health, according to Dr Meg Arroll, a psychologist with Healthspan.

She says rituals can help us to regulate emotions, enhance performance and improve social connection.

"Performing rituals gives us a sense of perceived control, which is paramount to maintaining wellbeing in times of uncertainty," she says. "Common rituals lead to behavioural synchrony, which generates feelings of unity and cohesiveness."

