



Westfield Health's

Ultimate Christmas Survival Guide

A step by step guide on looking
after your wellbeing this
Christmas

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Ultimate Christmas Survival Guide



About Westfield Health

We're dedicated to making a healthy difference to the quality of life of our customers and the communities in which they live and work.

We inspire and empower each other to be the best that we can be, so we can deliver evidence-based health and wellbeing solutions that support people, communities, and workplaces to be healthier.

We're proud of our not for profit heritage and are passionate about making a healthy difference. We have no shareholders, so the more successful we are the more we can give back to those around us.

By Westfield Health

Our Ultimate Christmas Survival Guide offers practical advice on surviving the festive season, covering four areas of health and wellbeing:

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How to eat well this Christmas

By Richard Holmes

Richard is Director of Wellbeing at Westfield health. He has dedicated his career to improving people's quality of life. He's passionate about the impact of health and wellbeing on business and individual performance, and manages Westfield Health's exclusive partnership with Sheffield Hallam University's Advanced Wellbeing Research Centre.

Richard has been cited in, and contributed to, a number of wellbeing articles across trade and consumer titles, including The Metro, Employee Benefits and Occupational Health.

What springs to mind when you think about Christmas? Presents? Sleigh bells? Tinsel? But what's the thing we all look forward to the most? You guessed it - the food!

We love to indulge in our favourite festive foods over the Christmas period. From mince pies and selection boxes to Christmas dinner with all the trimmings. Even your workplace can become inundated with sweet treats, but it's important to make sure that we are more mindful of our nutrition while enjoying a Christmas cookie or two.

If you're worried that you'll fall off the healthy eating bandwagon or want some advice on how you can keep your body well nourished, we've got some top tips on how to eat well over the Christmas period.

Eating out

Christmas is in the air and it seems that every weekend in December is booked up with Christmas dos, friendly catch ups and festive lunches. It can be hard to stick to our healthy eating habits while eating out, so here's how you can enjoy yourself while eating out, but make smart choices:

Shake off the salt

It's recommended that adults eat no more than 6g salt a day, which is easy to keep track of when you're cooking dinner or buying lunch from the supermarket, but what about when you're eating out? Here's how you can cut down on salt when eating out or ordering in:

- When you order a pizza, choose a vegetable or chicken topping instead of pepperoni, bacon, or extra cheese.
- If you're having a pasta dish, choose one with a tomato-based sauce with vegetables or chicken, rather than bacon, cheese or sausage.

Braving the buffet

Buffets can be dangerous for anyone who loves their food because before you know it you're four plates deep and 1000 calories over your daily recommended amount. Try loading your first plate with healthy options, like lean meats and vegetables, before you head for the calorific sides.

Hangover food

It seems temptation is around every corner in December, but eating the wrong food can make you feel sluggish and lethargic. It's hard not to reach for the crisps, fast food or bacon sandwich the morning after the night before, but try out these tips on a hangover to help you feel better:

- Rehydrate to help deal with the painful symptoms and drink bland liquids that are easy on the stomach, like water and soda water.
- Eat a veggie soup – try a bouillon, a thin vegetable-based broth which has a good source of vitamins and minerals and is easy for the stomach to digest.
- Sugary foods can help you feel less trembly.
- Fruit smoothies with potassium rich foods like bananas, apricots and oranges help replenish the electrolytes lost due to the diuretic effects of alcohol.

Hydration is key

Drinking a minimum of 1.2 litres can not only improve the condition of your skin, it improves drowsiness, headaches, concentration and energy levels. Most of us enjoy the odd boozy night, but around the festive build up we're out socialising more and enjoying a Christmas tippie or two. We know we're a little worse for wear after a night on the beer, so keeping hydrated to help your body repair is essential.

Here's how you can keep hydrated on a night out, avoid that horrendous hangover and hopefully a red faced moment after a Christmas do:

- The more alcohol you drink, the less water your body retains, so drink plenty of water before you go out.
- Try alternating between an alcoholic and a soft drink to help to reduce the amount of alcohol you drink.
- Avoid dark drinks as they contain more alcoholic toxins which contributes to hangovers. Drinking water will help to flush out these toxins and minimise their effect.
- Eating isn't cheating, the presence of food in the stomach will help delay the absorption of alcohol into the blood and stop you getting drunk very quickly. Don't be tempted to skip meals so you can stockpile calories for drinking, you'll be missing vital nutrients your body needs from food.
- Try drinking coconut water, it helps to hydrate you quicker because of its electrolyte content (including potassium).



How to keep active

By Barry Wood

Barry is managing director at Seven Hills Fitness, and is dedicated to providing people with access to the highest standard of personal training, whether this be at home or in the workplace, or any time over the web.

As well as providing world class physical training, Barry also offers nutritional and goal setting advice to help people achieve their goals. He is passionate about smashing down the barriers preventing people from becoming the best version of themselves, helping people to become fitter and healthier.

The Christmas build up has begun and in the middle of the never ending to do list, finding time to exercise can be a challenge. We're out socialising on Christmas dos and up late online shopping for the perfect present, add that to the dark, cold nights, it seems easier to flop onto the sofa with a ready meal instead of dragging yourself to the gym.

But keeping up with exercise still needs to be on your agenda to keep you fighting fit for Christmas. We've put together our top tips on how you can keep yourself motivated and active over the countdown to Christmas.

Our top tips for keeping active

Make a plan with friends

Commit to at least a couple of nights a week with a friend or colleague to exercise together. It could be an exercise class, a jog around the park, or just a power walk on your lunch break. Exercising with a friend can be fun and a great help in supporting you to continue with your fitness programme. Plus, you'll be less likely to cancel last minute because you won't want to let your friend down!

Join the digital revolution

If the shopping and socialising has booked you out for the next few weeks and you can't make it to your regular exercise class or gym, try using that spare 20 minutes to do a quick work out at home with a digital bootcamp or DVD.

Walk, walk and walk some more

Walking is such an easy and often neglected form of physical activity that you can easily incorporate into your everyday life. Here's a few ways to up your step game:

- Get on your woollies and walk to work! Or if your commute isn't walkable, park further away or get off the bus a couple of stops earlier.
- Arrange walking meetings.
- Track your steps with wearable technology or an app, you could hold a healthy competition and see who can do the most steps each week.
- Don't draft that email or dial that phone number, get up and talk to your colleagues if they're in your building.
- Use the stairs instead of the lift.

Move more at work

Research has found that some employees spend between 5-8 hours per day sitting at desks which can be a huge health risk. Try getting up and moving away from your desk every hour, you could:

- Use the printer/kitchen at the other end of the office.
- Get out of your chair every 60 minutes to move and stretch. Even the slightest movement will increase blood circulation, bringing oxygen and vital nutrients to the body and mind.
- Sit less – have walking or standing meetings. If long meetings are unavoidable, have a 5 minute movement break every hour to stretch and move around. You'll be surprised how much more focused and attentive people will be afterwards!

Got no energy?

If you're shattered from work and planning for Christmas, the last thing you should do is exercise, right? Wrong! Exercising will give you more energy if you're feeling lethargic. If you're feeling drained from a stressful week, exercise can be a great way of relieving that built up tension.

Become a health hero

We all know someone who takes part in sport, an exercise class or another form of physical activity. Track them down and find out if anyone else wants to join in the activities. From joining a netball team or doing some lunchtime yoga, to creating a 5 a side football team, find out from colleagues if they'd be interested in starting up a new activity to get fit together.

Top tip: To really feel the benefits of walking, walk at a pace that makes you breathe a little faster, feel warmer and slightly increases your heart rate.

Be the NEATest person in the office

Non-exercise activity thermogenesis (NEAT) is the energy expended for everything we do that isn't sleeping, eating or exercising. It can be anything from walking to work, typing, housework and even fidgeting. Every movement you do burns calories, from picking up a cup of coffee to getting out of the chair. The more of these little movements you do a day means more calories are burned, metabolism is increased and this can lead to the body then using stored fat as energy. So make sure you get up and about in the office.

Did you know?

- Just 30 minutes of exercise 3 times a week can increase your serotonin levels, making you feel happier and healthier.
- Exercise can boost the immune system – that's why it's good to exercise regularly.

So what are you waiting for? Get you and your colleagues fit and ready to take Christmas and the New Year by storm. We can support you to make the smallest of changes with the biggest impact. Get in touch to find out how we can get your staff's fitness journey into their working life.

Being active at work

British people sit for an average of 8.9 hours each day. Office workers are spending between 5-8 of these hours sat at their desks, and research indicates that this poses a real health risk, irrespective of how active people are outside of work.

Sedentary behaviour is defined by taking part in little to no physical activity. A sedentary lifestyle consists of excessive periods of sitting or lying down whilst engaging in activity such as reading, watching television or using a mobile phone or computer for most of the day.

Whilst scheduling in exercise outside of work to combat sedentary behaviour has great health benefits, employees still need to remember be active at work. Studies have shown that the negative effects of a sedentary work day can't be undone by exercising afterwards, it needs to be a cumulative effect from moving more during the day.

Developing a movement mindset is essential when it comes to combating a sedentary lifestyle. A movement mindset isn't about exercising – it's about acknowledging that smaller, more frequent bouts of activity are beneficial to our health and taking steps towards moving more. In return, this seemingly small change can have huge health benefits.

We've put together a helpful infographic containing 6 simple tips you can follow in the office to overcome sedentary behaviour and be more active at work. [Read the full article here.](#)



Coping with stress

By Richard Holmes

Richard is Director of Wellbeing at Westfield health. He has dedicated his career to improving people's quality of life. He's passionate about the impact of health and wellbeing on business and individual performance, and manages Westfield Health's exclusive partnership with Sheffield Hallam University's Advanced Wellbeing Research Centre.

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Underneath the glistening tinsel, carefully wrapped gifts and turkey basting, Christmas can be the root cause of a lot of stress for many people. All the extra time we spend planning the 'perfect Christmas' on top of everyday life means there's less time to look after yourself when you might need it the most. So we've put together our top tips on how to not let stress get the better of you during the Christmas build up.

Our top tips on managing stress

Create a plan

Christmas can be overwhelming and the build-up a little chaotic, so sit down with a pen and paper (or your tablet) and make a list of everything you need to do before, during, and after the big day. To help you order your thoughts and keep on track, break down larger tasks into smaller ones and write them in order of priority.

Remember, you're not in this alone, you can ask for help from friends or family to tackle the list with you.

Mental resilience

We all need a bit of mental resilience, especially when things go wrong. So what can you do to help?

- Be more assertive – and don't feel bad about saying no.
- Avoid difficult colleagues, family members, and acquaintances.
- Never take on more than you know you can cope with.
- Organise your time and always schedule time for you.
- By looking after your health and wellbeing you're much more likely to tackle any problems that come your way with confidence.

Get active

Physical activity is a natural stress buster, it gets rid of the harmful adrenaline that's produced when you get stressed and causes your brain to release endorphins which are feel good hormones.

Watch your units

With all the Christmas parties and socialising, drinking alcohol to excess can sometimes cause low mood and heighten anxiety, not to mention double your calorie intake! Read the Mental Health Foundation's alcohol and mental health leaflet for advice and support on how alcohol can affect you [here](#).

Look after your body

Energy, stamina and a strong immune system is what we need to keep on going when the pressure starts to mount. It can be tempting to reach for stimulants like coffee or high-fat foods, but caffeine can give you an initial boost then leave you weary, and high-fat meals raise stress hormones and keep them high. Try these top tips to look after your body:

- Boost your immune system by eating plenty of vitamins and minerals. You can find more information on a healthy diet with the [Eatwell Guide](#).
- Drink water - the brain can only operate effectively if its cells are properly hydrated. So make sure you're properly hydrated to improve your concentration, mood and to help you to cope better with stressful situations.
- Get your sleep - good quality sleep is the only way you can properly recharge your batteries; you can't deal with stressful situations well if you're 'running on half empty'.

Top tip: Christmas can also create added stress at work, so we recently outlined 10 steps towards building resilience to cope with stress in the workplace and avoid burnout. [Read the article here.](#)

Take a deep breath

Stress makes your heart beat faster and your breathing become shallow. You can reverse that process through deep breathing, stretching or physical activity.

Take some 'you' time

Whether it's morning, afternoon or evening, make sure you take a few minutes out of your busy day to relax and do something you enjoy. It could be settling down with a good book, meditating or listening to music. Taking the time to slow down and do something you enjoy gives your body and mind the chance to rejuvenate.

Don't work too hard

If you're in a bit of a panic trying to get everything tied up at work before you leave for Christmas, don't be tempted to work through your breaks if you're pushed for time. Working tired means that your work takes longer, you are more likely to make mistakes and you're less resilient when things go wrong – so make sure you take time to refuel – it will help you get everything done.

Take a break

Research shows that working long hours is associated with an increased risk of hypertension, cardiovascular disease, fatigue, stress, depression, musculoskeletal disorders, chronic infections and diabetes. Professor Cary Cooper of the Lancaster University Management School has shown that working over 45 hours a week can damage your health, physically and psychologically.

We can't operate at 100% all of the time. Even the most energetic, dynamic and dedicated person can't be giving it all constantly. So take a break to unwind, re-focus and replenish your energy levels.

What's the worst that can happen?

If the gifts arrive late, if the dinner isn't as good as you'd hoped, if some of the family can't make it, ask yourself “what's the worst that can happen?”. Don't get caught up on trying to make everything perfect and forget to enjoy yourself, it's your Christmas too remember!

Write it down

Emotions can run high during the holidays, but a lot of what we think is never said out-loud. Try writing down how you are feeling - what makes you happy, sad, angry, or frustrated to clear your mind and release bottled up stress.

Laugh it up!

Laughing helps to keep the mind clear and balanced – so have some fun! And if things go wrong, try and see the humorous side, you'll be surprised how much better you'll feel if you laugh it off.

All of this advice and so much more is available for you and your business through our Wellbeing Programme and Health Calendar with seasonal advice and expertise. It could be the boost your business needs to keep staff's physical and mental health and wellbeing in peak condition to take on the New Year.

Top tip: Heightened levels of stress during the festive period can also affect our productivity. We've put together our top 5 tips on sustaining productivity during winter, so that you can stay focused and on track. [Read the full article here.](#)



How to sleep better

By James Wilson

James aka The Sleep Geek, is a sleep behaviour and environment expert who is committed to improving the nation's sleep and works extensively with organisations, from blue chip corporates to sports teams, helping their people understand their sleep better and what changes to their behaviours and environment they need to make.

He has previously worked with The Children's Sleep Charity and led the largest Teen Project in the UK whilst with them, working with 5 schools and roughly 2,000 children. He helps companies develop sleep products and services and was a member of the founding team at SleepCogni, a medical device start up that is looking to revolutionise the diagnosis and treatment of sleep disorders.

December is here and we're socialising more, spending more, doing more, eating more - but sleeping less. It's easy to get into the party mood and start burning the candle at both ends, working, partying, shopping and planning the perfect Christmas. Here are our top tips on how to get quality sleep over the festive period.

Our top tips on getting a better night's sleep

Getting the kids to sleep on Christmas Eve

It's the most exciting night of the year (Father Christmas is coming!) and getting the kids to sleep can be a huge task. The chances are that they'll be far too giddy at their normal bedtime on Christmas Eve, so try not to be too prescriptive. Here are some ideas you can try:

- Turn off all blue screens about an hour before your kids usual bedtime.
- Give them a bath/shower about 30 minutes before their usual sleep time.
- If they go to bed and seem over excited, take them back downstairs and do some relaxing activities like reading, singing, jigsaws or colouring.

The main thing to remember is not to worry too much, as long as they have a good routine and wake up at a similar time every day both before and after Christmas Day, they'll switch back to their usual sleep behaviours relatively quickly.

Dealing with disturbed sleep

The party season over Christmas can have a real impact on our sleep and productivity. Now I'm no party pooper, Christmas is all about enjoying yourself, but if there's one thing you can do to help deal with your disrupted sleep during the party season, it's this: resist the temptation to lay in bed all day after a late night.

If you've been up late Christmas shopping or out drinking until late, try and get up as close to your usual wake up time as possible so that you don't disrupt your internal clock. This means you'll be able to get to sleep that evening around your usual bedtime and you'll be able to get up the next morning.

So even though you might be a little hungover and fear a tough day ahead of you, get up and keep your internal body clock on track to avoid a number of days of poor sleep.

The exhaustion epidemic

Fatigue. It's long-term exhaustion, low energy and motivation which can be caused by sleep deprivation, diet, mental or physical illness. Yet many of us suffer in silence, accepting exhaustion at work as a result of living a busy life, but this shouldn't be the case.

Feeling constantly drained isn't normal — or acceptable. It's a cry for help from your body or mind, and being in a constant state of exhaustion at work can damage your physical and mental health, taking a toll on your quality of life and relationships.

86%

are unable to speak openly in confidence with their line manager about how tiredness is impacting on performance at work

We recently surveyed over 1,000 UK working adults to examine fatigue and its effect on people in the workplace. Alarming, it shows that not only are we a nation suffering from tiredness and fatigue from our 'always on' working lifestyle, but we've got a culture that doesn't accept or see it as a real issue. Read the full article [here](#).

Give the gift of a good night's sleep

Magnesium spray

One of the key components to my work with poor sleepers is helping them to create an anchor point to their pre-sleep routine. I often use a magnesium spray/flakes to do this, which could make an ideal gift for the poor sleeper in your life. Magnesium is great for helping us relax on a cellular level and also strengthens the part of the brain that produces melatonin, the hormone that helps us sleep. There's evidence that it helps some people with Restless Leg Syndrome too.

Alpaca duvets/pillows and bamboo bedding

A drop in core temperature is incredibly important to us sleeping well and it only takes a small change in our core temperature during the night for us to start waking up. For many of us, temperature fluctuations are a real issue, but alpaca duvets/pillows and bamboo bedding can help to keep our body at a consistent temperature, giving you a longer and less disturbed sleep.

Sunshine alarm clock

One of the main building blocks that I use to help poor sleepers improve their sleep is making sure they have a consistent wake up time every single day. We often obsess about getting to bed at a certain time, but we're unable to force sleep, but we can control the time we wake up and a consistent wake up time will help your body get into a healthy rhythm. My favourite tool to achieve a consistent wake up time is a sunshine (or daylight) alarm clock. They wake you up with natural light, ensuring that your body stops producing melatonin and that when awake you stay awake. If you are going to buy one product to help you sleep better this is the one!

We believe in well beings

Start your health and wellbeing journey today

Our insight-led health and wellbeing strategies can support you in improving productivity, retaining staff and making your company a desirable place for prospective employees to work.

Click here to download our free Health & Wellbeing Toolkit, which contains all the information you need to start creating your company's strategy. It features help and advice on everything from building the business case and exploring supplier options, to implementing and evaluating the process.



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