HO! HO! HEALTHY HOLIDAYS!

Top tips to manage diabetes at Christmas

KEEP CHRISTMAS SPECIAL: set aside your own special days to enjoy your favourite food and drink. Decide your limits in advance so the celebrations don't sprawl over a whole fortnight. Then you can indulge in a guilt-free festival, knowing you'll return to your normal healthy lifestyle on schedule

SECRET SUGAR: beware hidden sugars in brandy sauce / butter, honey, maple syrup and such. It's inside cranberry, mint, tomato and brown sauce, and many salad dressings like prawn cocktail sauce. Choose vinegar / oil based dressings and use a dash of soy or Worcestershire sauce to add a splash of flavour

JUST SAY NO: Make an advance plan so you can politely turn down food which you don't fancy without offending anyone. Try 'that looks lovely but I already ate, thanks', or 'I'm not hungry right now but I'd love a herbal tea.' People love giving Christmas cake and mince pies: no one will mind if you take your share with you 'to eat later'

SERVE YOURSELF: Other people can't know your dietary preferences or requirements. Help yourself when possible so you can choose lean protein, extra veg, unrefined high-fibre carbs and healthy fats from oily fish, nuts and seeds. Steer clear of dishes obviously high in saturated fat, sugar and salt, and be mindful of portion sizes. A smaller plate can really help!

PILE ON THE PLANTS: Extra veg will stabilise your blood sugar, help you feel full for longer, and lowers the chances of going back foe seconds. Fill one quarter of your plate with lean meat like turkey breast, and fill half the plate with veg: peas, carrots, broccoli, cauliflower, beans, cabbage, sprouts and all those good things. That leaves the final quarter of the plate for stuffing, potato, Yorkshire pudd and pigs in blankets

CHOOSE YOUR COMPANIONS: Having health-conscious friends and family for mutual support can be fabulous. Spend more time with other people who make healthy lifestyle choices and help keep each other on track. If you always get together at a café, take this opportunity to try something new: go swimming maybe, or sing carols by candlelight!

DON'T DROWN IT! It's temptating to smother mince pies and Christmas pudding in cream, custard or brandy sauce, full of saturated fat and sugar which will push up your glucose and cholesterol levels. Swap to Greek or kefir yoghurt, half-fat crème fraiche or just enjoy the full flavour of 'naked' food

DON'T DOZE: Resist the temptation to slump on the sofa after a huge meal. Go for a gentle stroll with friends and family. A half-hour walk after dinner will reduce your stress, improve your sleep, lower your blood pressure, glucose and cholesterol levels and burn off a few of those calories

EATING OUT: Choose your food t oreflect how hungry you are and how much you want to eat. Order first so you set the trend and aren't affected by what other people order. If this restaurant serves really big portions, choose a starter for your main meal with side dishes of extra veg. Don't be shy about asking: it's Christmas so you're allowed to choose!

DON'T PIG OUT: Processed meats like gammon, salami, pate, sausage rolls and pigs in blankets are high in saturated fat and salt, linked to many long-term health conditions. Try some plant-based nibbles instead, like falafels and hummus

GO NUTS! Whole, plain, raw and unsalted nuts are rich in healthy fats, protein and fibre. A small handful will blunt your hunger and give you something satisfying to nibble. Avoid salted, roasted and coated nuts (but baked are usually fine). Try toasting cashews, pumpkin or sunflower seeds in a dry pan with a little paprika for a spicy treat

SMART PRE-PARTY SNACKING: You've heard the advice not to go grocery shopping on an empty stomach. The same applies to Christmas parties. Eat a small, healthy snack before you leave home so you're less likely to be tempted by the vast array of treats on offer when you join the party

BEWARE THE BUFFET: Don't linger near the table laden with irresistible nibbles; relocate to a different room if possible. Out of sight really is out of mind! Forget the food and focus instead on meaningful conversations and cherished moments with your friends and family

TESTING TIMES: If you monitor your blood glucose levels, be aware that stress and extra food will raise your glucose. Indoor social gatherings can trigger mild infections which can also raise your glucose levels in the following days. Alcohol and exercise usually have the opposite (short term) effect; a relaxing warm bath can also help bring glucose levels down

DITCH DISTRACTIONS: Eating while distracted can lead to increased calorie consumption. If you split your attention between Netflix, social feeds and food, then your body's fullness signals won't be properly processed. You also won't enjoy the full flavour of your food! So switch off and tune in to your special meal with your special people

HEALTHY OPTIONS: enjoy your Christmas turkey but choose skinless breast meat rather than fatty thigh meat. Or swap to salmon for a healthy portion of oily fish!

EMBRACE THE OUTDOORS: Don't meet your mates at a café where you might buy an expensive frothy coffee full of sugary syrup. Take a stroll by the seaside instead or go for a wander in the woods. Wrap up warm and spend some time in nature in the middle of the day – it'll benefit both mind and body. And break out the Thermos flask with hot herbal tea...

DRINK SMART: Alcohol relaxes your inhibitions and makes it harder to resist tasty treats. It's also full of calories and (depending on your medication) may trigger hypoglycaemia. Ideally, only drink alcohol with food. Alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic ones. Stay hydrated with plenty of plain water or fruit / herbal teas. Have a healthy snack before you leave home, and avoid over-doing things with ultra-sweet, high-fat 'festive special' cocktails. Or opt to be the designated driver, and stick to fizzy water with a slice of lime!

ORDER MEDS EARLY: Make sure you have enough medication to last the full festive fortnight. Order early so your GP and pharmacy have plenty of time to prep your prescriptions. Ideally (especially if you use insulin), maintain your normal mealtime schedule and avoid skipping meals or non-stop nibbling...

