



HOW THE HEALTH GURUS

do Christmas

Do health and wellbeing experts set aside their principles and load up on pigs in blankets and mince pies at Christmas like the rest of us? Not quite. **Louise Atkinson** finds out how they make their festive feasts just that little bit healthier.

THE WELLBEING GURU

Jasmine Hemsley, 43, is a TV presenter, author and food writer. She lives in Kent with her husband Nick and their two young children



When it comes to eating and feeding my family, I follow the ancient Indian principles of Ayurveda. That means home-cooked food made with love and connection. Ayurveda (which translates to 'the science of longevity') has become such an intuitive part of my everyday life, it naturally spills over even into celebrations like Christmas.

Our day is usually very relaxed and informal. We will have a light breakfast (as always) and sit down for our main meal at lunchtime when digestion is strongest. Before we eat, we'll fire up our digestion with something salty, fiery and tangy such as salt, ginger and lime to make the mouth water. Nick will probably cook and it will be good, old-fashioned turkey, with loads of vegetable side dishes and plenty of homemade chutneys to balance the richness. I try to eat very slowly, really chewing my food - if I eat late, or when rushed or stressed, it's a recipe for indigestion for me. We avoid iced drinks with the meal because, according to Ayurveda, sipping on hot or warm drinks (even alcoholic ones) is a better way to help the food go down. Ayurveda is all about going with the flow and listening to your body.

TUNING IN

When I'm eating, I often ask myself: 'Does this serve me well at this moment?' At Christmas, this might be: 'Will this Christmas pudding be enjoyed now on top of a massive dinner or will I enjoy it more tomorrow when I'm actually hungry and looking forward to it?' Having said that, our Christmas lunch is always capped by my giant mince pie for dessert. I try to make it a bit healthier than ordinary mince pies by using chickpea flour in the pastry. This stops us falling into the trap of eating too much wheat with every meal and snack; plus, the pie is protein-rich, and has a nutty flavour which provides a savoury contrast to the fruit filling. I make the filling using much less sugar than most recipes demand, allowing the natural flavours of spices and orange peel to sing. I aim to keep our family sugar intake low and, so far, I've managed to keep my oldest daughter Mahi, two, away from sweets!

After Christmas, I get back on track and do a three-day 'Cleanse and Reset' programme to reset my taste buds, appetite and routine after the excess of Christmas cheer. It's also a great way to say goodbye to the last year and hello to the new one. Visit jasminehemsley.com ▶

FESTIVE ESSENTIALS

❄️ SOUND BATHING

At some point on Christmas Day, I will pop in earplugs, close my eyes and listen to a meditative sound bath. Simple guided meditation like this is a great way to escape the chaos and decompress.

❄️ BOXING DAY SOUP

My mother-in-law makes the most delicious soup from all the Christmas leftovers - it might look slightly dubious, and I'm normally a 'broth and chunks' soup person, but this one is smooth and utterly delicious.

THE GUT HEALTH EXPERT

Tim Spector, 65, is a professor of genetic epidemiology at Kings College and co-founder of Zoe, the personalised nutrition company. He lives in London with wife Veronique



Christmas in our family is usually spent abroad; you are most likely to find us skiing or hiking in the mountains somewhere with the kids, who are now in their 30s.

On Christmas day itself, turkey isn't on the menu. My wife is French-Belgian and she is not a fan of turkey and trimmings; daughter Sophie is vegetarian, and I am mostly,

too, because of the health benefits it brings. This makes our family culinary endeavours quite unusual. Last year, for example, we were in the Italian mountains on Christmas Day and enjoyed a hearty feast made up of a variety of deliciously different dishes rather than one central meat roast. I particularly relished the variety of plants that were served as side dishes – slow-braised garden peas with onions, roasted mushrooms and chestnuts, bitter greens stir-fried with garlic. And the red wine that accompanied it.

For me, the big Christmas focus is on cheese: baked cheese dishes like *tartiflette* are a firm favourite. We always have a pre-Christmas celebration with my brother and his family before we go off travelling, and a vegetable lasagne will be served; plus a cheeseboard with lots of my pickles and sauerkraut. I serve my more experimental fermented creations (I'm particularly proud of my mixed vegetable 'Timchi').

When it comes to treats, I'll opt for gut-friendly Florentines – I love these thin nutty, fruity biscuits partially covered in dark chocolate. My favourite festive drink is a good red; but I might reach for a low-alcohol beer as well, so I don't drink too much alcohol... definitely not good for my health. I make a big batch of kombucha or my fruity water kefir to offer around – it is absolutely delicious.

It doesn't matter what day of the year it is – I will aim to keep my sleep and exercise levels consistent, and, on Boxing Day, I will usually schedule a slightly longer overnight fast to give my gut time to recover from the previous day's indulgences.

To find out more about personalised nutrition and gut health, visit zoe.com

FESTIVE ESSENTIALS

❄️ DARK CHOCOLATE

No dairy chocolate is allowed in the house over Christmas (it is full of sugar and fat with very few healthy polyphenols), but artisan dark chocolate is a favourite treat.

❄️ FERMENTED VEG

I make my own selection of fermented vegetables to go with the cheeseboard. They all help to prevent hangovers thanks to their beneficial impact on gut microbes.

THE IMMUNOLOGIST

Dr Jenna Macciochi, 42, lives in Brighton with her husband, Peter and their nine-year-old twins



Breakfast on Christmas day will be an upgrade from our normal porridge or poached eggs and, if I'm cooking, I might prepare smoked salmon and avocado, or a special mushroom pâté (if you leave mushrooms in a sunny window, they're a great source of immunity-bolstering vitamin D). We need just enough fuel to sustain us through a bracing swim in the English Channel, then I'll settle in for the long, slow process of creating a Christmas dinner. We always have turkey but, for me, the joy comes in getting creative – and healthy – with the side dishes. I love vegetables, so this is an opportunity for me to spend time in the kitchen making interesting combinations.

I cook everything in extra-virgin olive oil – even the roast potatoes – because research shows it is so high in beneficial polyphenols that they help to keep the oil stable, even at very high temperatures. It's a long-held tradition in our house to set out a tray of pickles – gherkins, red cabbage, sauerkraut, piccalilli and beetroot – and our gut microbiome certainly benefits from a tart blast of fermented foods. We're not really a pudding family, so the kids will settle for ice cream (chocolate and vanilla) and Peter will probably buy himself a carton of custard.

I'm partial to a non-alcoholic G&T! My favourite is Sentia which was created by scientists to help trigger the GABA system and help to boost your mood. It gives me the same 'ahh, time to relax' feeling you might get from a glass of wine.

Your Blueprint for Strong Immunity: Personalise Your Diet and Lifestyle for Better Health by Dr Jenna Macciochi is out now (Yellow Kite, £14.99) ➤

FESTIVE ESSENTIALS

❄️ AN ICY SWIM IN THE SEA

We live in Brighton, and it's a big tradition to pile down to the beach and run into the sea; plus, it's good for your immune system!

❄️ SEASONAL PRODUCE

Rather than focusing on superfoods, we should all be filling our plate with seasonal foods such as bright orange squashes rich in betacarotenes, mushrooms, winter berries and leafy greens at this time of year. Rich in vitamins and minerals, these nutrients are perfectly aligned with what our bodies need at this time of year, when viruses are present.



THE NHS DOCTOR

Dr Rupy Aujla, 38, worked as GP before launching his research-backed healthy recipe platform The Doctor's Kitchen. He lives in London with his wife, Rochelle

Generally, I recommend eating a diverse diet of whole, unprocessed food with quality fats and proteins, and plenty of colour on your plate. Christmas, however, is different! It's a proper once-a-year feast, and those couple of days should be enjoyed with no restrictions.

We take Christmas pretty seriously in our household, and some of our traditions are unchanged for over 20 years. This year, we will be in North London with my parents and my sister Jasmine. The festivities start with a fish supper on Christmas Eve (always a white fish or seafood with my sister's creamy mustard mash and broccoli or charred cabbage on the side) - yes, there are good-quality fats in the fish and abundant nutrients in the greens, but that mash is definitely not healthy! The great health benefits lie in the uplifting social aspect of that meal, washed down with a glass of white wine, which we use to toast each other and make mini speeches reflecting on our goals and achievements over the previous year.

I'll start the day with a mini-workout, just stretching or doing a bit of high-intensity interval training (HiIT). Exercise is so important for your health and it's such a pleasure for me that I wouldn't miss it, even on Christmas Day. Mum and Dad (both in their 60s) have a morning routine of floor Pilates, too. Then we'll spend the morning creating a breakfast fresh-fruit platter of grapes, kiwis, clementines, berries, apples and pears, plus a cheese and charcuterie board

FESTIVE ESSENTIALS

❄️ HARD-BOILED EGGS

Hard-boiled eggs are a tradition for Christmas Day breakfast. They **HAVE** to be jammy inside and getting them right is always my job.

❄️ THE CHRISTMAS WALK

Whatever the weather, we will pull on coats and wellies, and get out for a walk together after breakfast; it's healthy to be out in the fresh air.

❄️ PAXO STUFFING

Over the years we've each had a go at trying different homemade stuffing recipes but now we are resolute - it has to come out of a packet, and it has to be Paxo.

which is laid out with wholegrain crackers (a useful source of fibre). Although I normally try to avoid added sugar, on Christmas Day there will always be a panettone on the table, and we'll sip pink Champagne and open our presents to the soundtrack of cheesy Christmas hits.

A LATE LUNCH

At some point we have an obligatory walk in the park to make room for lunch, which is usually at 4pm. We only eat two meals on Christmas day, partly because I don't think we could squeeze any more food in, and partly because skipping supper gives the gut a bit of a rest.

My parents don't like turkey, so we'll roast two chickens and serve them with Brussels sprouts (roasted until charred with chestnuts and red onion), honey-roasted carrots, parsnips, cabbage, potatoes cooked in the chicken fat and stuffing. I've become pescatarian this

year, because our dog, Nutmeg, looks like a little lamb and I've found the ethics of eating animals are creeping up on me - so this year, I'll make a nut roast. The cranberry sauce has to be made from fresh cranberries (packed with polyphenols) and, afterwards, we'll treat ourselves to Christmas pudding and my wife's outrageously good tiramisu (which has absolutely no health credentials at all). Oh, and we'll share a very nice bottle of red wine or two - not because red wine contains an antioxidant plant compound called resveratrol, but because it's Christmas! Visit thedoctorskitchen.com for more healthy-eating ideas. ■