



KEEPING SAFE DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

As 2009 comes to a close, the year-end festivities are eagerly anticipated. But health experts warn that too much of a good thing is always harmful, and advise several ways where we can draw the line but still have the time of our lives.

It's the time of the season to eat, drink and be merry. With the advent of the Christmas season and the ringing in of 2010, many are already dusting off their party hats, shopping for new threads and getting ready to say goodbye to 2009 in style.

Unfortunately, when all good things come to an end, unsafe sex; excessive drinking; over-eating; and social smoking gone overboard invariably find their way onto the consequences list.

As do unhealthy indulgences such as a lack of discipline with regular exercise and complacency over personal safety.

And so, to try and help you prevent history from repeating itself, Lifewise spoke to several health professionals to shed some light on the Dos and Don'ts to keep in mind this season. Have fun, party safe!

OVER EATING

Most people may gain weight after a series of parties or after a holiday, when they resort to binge eating. Other than weight gain, a number of people also end up with heartburn, or feel bloated and "gassy".

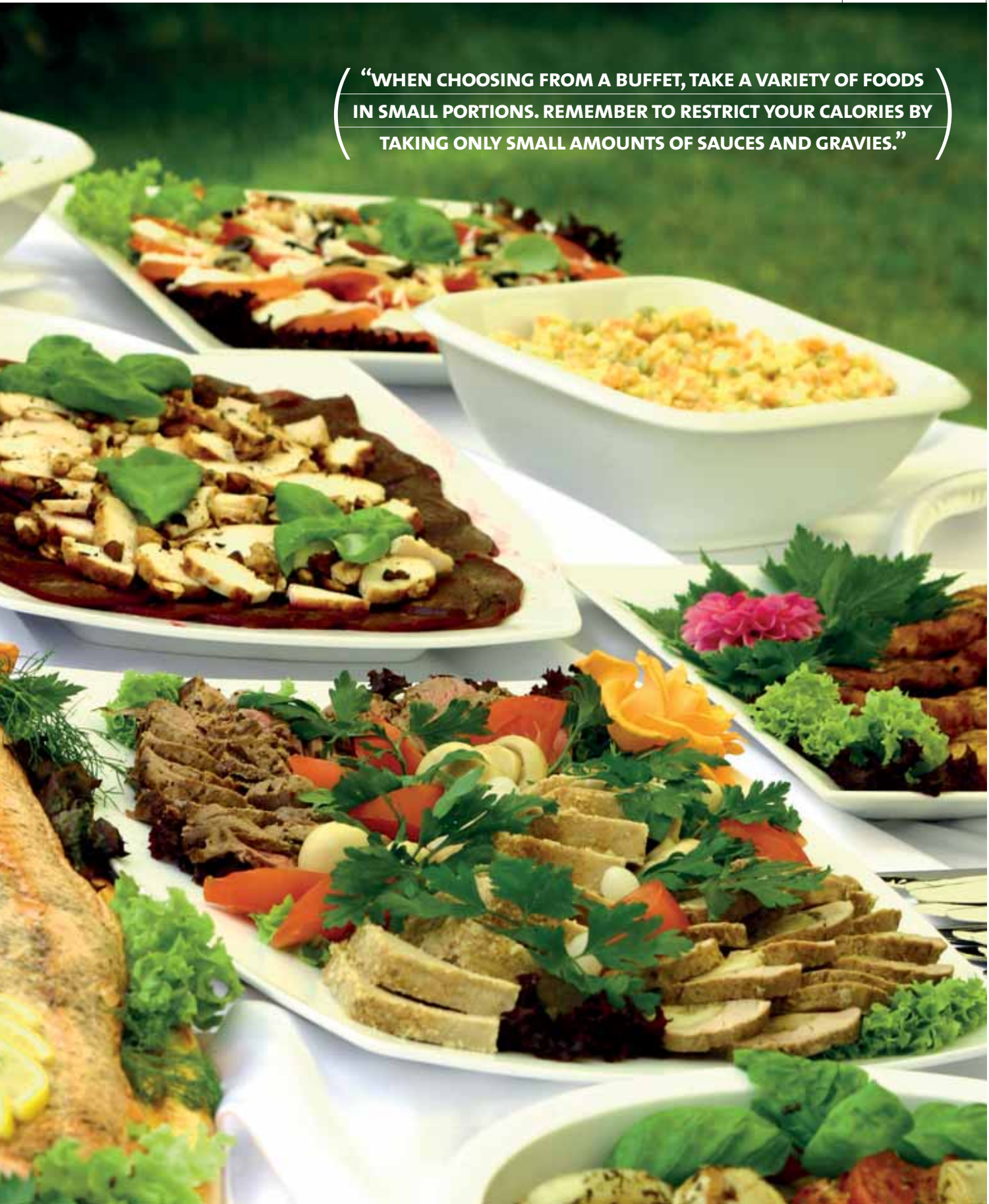
To avoid this, Dr Amitabh Monga, an Associate Consultant at Tan Tock Seng Hospital's (TTSH) Department of Gastroenterology says the following eating habits should be adopted.

- ▶ Eat small frequent meals rather than the usual three meals. Eating frequently helps to control blood sugar and to curb your appetite.
- ▶ Eat a light, healthy meal (such as a salad) a few hours before a potential binge. You are more likely to control your intake if you are not horribly hungry.
- ▶ Eat slowly and listen to your tummy cues. If you are not hungry, pass on the second helping to others. ❖



BY MICHELLE BONG

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Dr Monga also advises choosing snacks and nibbles wisely. For instance, opt for fruit or juicy carrots (and other crudités) as a snack rather than gobbling on chips. This is because such high fibre foods slow the passage of food through the intestines, making you feel fuller for a longer time. Also, when choosing from a buffet, take a variety of foods in small portions. Remember to restrict your calories by taking only small amounts of sauces and gravies.

He adds: “Share your favourite dessert with someone. Just a few spoons of your special treat may be enough to satisfy your sweet tooth.” Meanwhile, TTSH Department of Nutrition and Dietetics Manager, Ms Ng Kok Mun also advises “eating slowly, drinking water between servings and opting for steamed or grilled instead of fried foods”.

EXERCISE

Maintaining an exercise regime during the festive season can be as difficult as avoiding yet another glass of egg nog, or the last fried chicken drumstick. This is particularly so with the late nights partying and waking up late the mornings after. However, exercise does not necessarily need to be compromised during this period, says Principal Physiotherapist and certified Clinical Exercise Specialist Carolina Png.

“Since most festive seasons are synonymous with gatherings of friends and family, choose an exercise that can involve everyone. This may include activities such as rollerblading, swimming or even strolling in the park after a hearty meal together,” she says. “If you are going to a party that involves dancing, go ahead and dance the night away! That will certainly

help to burn off the calories from all that rich food you have consumed. There is no need to schedule extra sessions at the gym when you can have fun and still keep your calories in check while doing so!"

TTSH's Dr Monga adds that there are several tips you can follow to burn off the excess calories – if you just can't bring yourself to head to the gym.

- ▶ Park your car farther from the mall entrance, or your party venue.
- ▶ Try taking the stairs rather than the lift or the escalators.
- ▶ Before the party, take a brisk walk around your neighbourhood.

DRINKING AND DRIVING

Alcohol can impair a driver's judgement, co-ordination and reactions, making him or her, a hazard to themselves, their passengers, other road users and pedestrians.

Suffice to say, drink driving is such a serious offence in Singapore. In Singapore, if the driver is found with more than the legal limit of 35 microgrammes of alcohol per 100 millilitres of breath, or more than 80 milligrammes of alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood, he/she is deemed to have broken the law and it does not matter whether the driver has perfect control of the vehicle, when caught. Even when the alcohol level is under the legal limit, the driver can still be convicted if it is shown that he/she did not have proper control of the vehicle as a result of alcoholic intoxication.

Different drinks contain different alcohol content by volume. Its effects also depend on factors such as body size, gender, metabolism and how used you are to alcohol, all of which can make drinking guidelines confusing.

Still, many who have had one too many drinks still insist on getting behind the wheel to make the drive home. Advises Dr Tan Hwee Sim, an Associate Consultant at IMH's National Addictions Management Service, "If you're unsure how many drinks you've had, don't drive. Ideally, if you've enjoyed a drink, don't get behind the wheel at all.

"And as for sobering up, give yourself at least an hour for every half pint you've had – but even then the smart move is to stay out of the driving seat altogether. Arrange for someone who is sober to drive you home. Better yet, if you know you will be drinking, leave your car at home and use public transport (MRT, bus or taxi) to go home."

Dr Tan adds that other tips to drink safely include:

- ▶ Drinking plenty of water at the same time, to ensure your body doesn't dry out too badly.
- ▶ Eating before you drink (food that takes a long time to digest, such as bread) to line your stomach.
- ▶ Trying not to mix your drinks (such as beer and wine) as you are only adding the number of toxins that your body has to deal with.

- ▶ Kicking off your drinking session with a soft drink to stop you from feeling so thirsty.
- ▶ Turning up at the bar or party an hour or two later to minimise your drinking time.

SMOKING

For smokers, the festive season is an excuse to puff away more sticks, while wannabe-quitters succumb to social smoking. As such, Ms Grace Tan, Physiotherapist, Smoking Cessation Clinic, TTSH, says the following avoidance strategies can be adopted:

- ▶ At a party, avoid other smokers or better yet, buddy up and attend a party with friends who do not smoke or are trying to get you to quit.
- ▶ Hold off cigarette cravings by dancing or chatting to friends. Alternatively, sip water slowly just to have something to do.
- ▶ Minimise your alcohol intake, else you'll trigger cravings for a cigarette. ❖❖❖

WHERE TO GET HELP

TAN TOCK SENG HOSPITAL (TTSH)

Psychological Medicine Clinic

Level B1, Medical Centre
Tel: 6357-8002 / 8003
www.ttsh.com.sg

Nutrition & Dietetics

Level B2, TTSH Medical Centre
Tel: 6357-8322

Gastroenterology

Clinic 2A, Level 2, TTSH Medical Centre
Tel: 6357-8008

Smoking Cessation Counselling

Clinic 2B
Level 2, TTSH Medical Centre
Tel: 6357-7000

QuitLine

1800-438-2000

NATIONAL HEALTHCARE GROUP POLYCLINICS

For appointments, please call 6355-3000

DSC

Tel: 293-9648

INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH

Gambling Helpline

1800-6-668-668

All Addictions Helpline

6-RECOVER (6732-6837)

Hotline 800

(in Mandarin; for family or personal problems)
1800-353-5800

SOS

(anyone in crisis)
1800-221-4444

Seniors Helpline

(older adults who need a listening ear or counselling)
1800-555-5555

SAF Counselling Centre

(for full-time NS men or NS men)
1800-278-0222

Tinkle Friend

(Children who need a listening ear)
1800-274-4788

TOUCH Community Services

(support for children, youths at risk, needy families and the frail elderly)
6377-0122



Friends or family, Ms Tan adds, play an important role in anyone's journey to smoke less or stub out altogether.

SAFER SEX

We've all heard horror stories about how social or office Christmas parties can lead to many regretting their actions the next morning, and have found ourselves swearing the same will not happen to us. But mistakes do happen.

"As a result of the current economic downturn with job uncertainty, having to work longer hours and facing additional stress, it is not uncommon to relax and let go during the year-end festivities to take a breather from a hectic year. But that may result in throwing caution to the wind & being less careful about protecting oneself against acquiring sexually-transmitted illnesses (STIs)," adds Dr Martin Chio, a Consultant Dermatologist at the National Skin Centre.

This, he explains could come about due to or a combination of excessive consumption of alcohol, having sex with new or multiple partners, uncertainty of STI/HIV status of sexual partners, not using adequate prophylaxis (condom) during sex, or the incorrect use of prophylaxis during sex. The most commonly diagnosed STIs in Singapore for 2008, he reveals, were Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea, genital herpes and genital warts.

Because each new encounter, sexual exposure or sexual partner is a potential risk for an STI, Dr Chio advises one to be more aware of reducing the risk of STIs, in the following ways:

- ▶ Practicing abstinence.
- ▶ Avoiding multiple sexual partners, because you never know if they, in turn, have multiple sexual partners.
- ▶ Maintaining fidelity to one partner.
- ▶ Practising safer sex through the use of condoms or diaphragms, or the Pill.
- ▶ Establishing the correct and consistent use of condoms.

"If one suspects that one may have contracted an STI, seek help from an STI-trained doctor or the Department of STI Control Clinic as soon as possible," says Dr Chio. "If one has indulged in unsafe sex, the morning after brings two issues: the possibility of an unwanted pregnancy and the possible acquisition of an STI. Either way, it's best to look out for symptoms, and seek professional advice early to screen, diagnose and treat the issue expediently." +

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HOLIDAY STRESS

While the festive season is eagerly welcomed by some, it is a source of stress for others. Ms Velda Chen, Clinical Psychologist at the Institute of Mental Health's (IMH) Department of Psychology has the following tips to keep stress levels at a low.

1. Take care of yourself through regular exercise, regular mealtimes (especially breakfast) and a balanced diet. Getting sufficient sleep and limiting your caffeine intake also helps.
2. Make time for yourself to rest and relax – it is important to unwind and participate in activities that you enjoy doing. Plan the activities ahead to give yourself something to look forward to. Some examples include scheduling a massage or buying concert tickets.
3. Talk to a trusted friend or family member about your problems and feelings. Sharing your problems with someone whom you can talk freely without feeling judged can help relieve your burden and give you a different perspective.
4. Learn to say no. Trying to do everything – from shopping for 47 family members over two days or planning a dinner party – will make one feel overwhelmed and stressed out. There are only so many hours in a day. Know yourself and your limits. Prioritise what needs to be done, set your limits and stick to them.
5. Keep your reality in check by the scale of one to 10 (with one being a minor hassle and 10 being a true catastrophe) to rate if your reaction is proportionate to the event that is triggering the stress. Some events demand immediate attention, some don't. For stressors such as those that are rated between two to six, make a note of it and deal with them later.