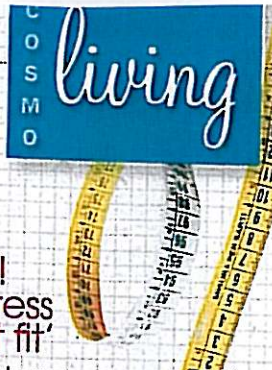


"Wool I wonder when that sugar rush will wear off"



December – the most fun, but also the most frustrating 31 days of the year. Here's how to enjoy every one of them...

2 'Help! My dress won't fit'

At no other time do we wear so many, clingy outfits and eat so much. No wonder weight stress peaks in December! "The girls in my office go on so much about outfits and what diets they're on that I get paranoid about my wardrobe and figure," says Jenny Williams, 25, an office manager from Birmingham.

Fix it Fact: if you overeat and drink too much for the five/six weeks pre-Christmas, you could put on a stone. So lose that, 'Sod it, it's nearly Christmas' mentality. "Devise a plan," advises lifestyle consultant Rachel McGuinness from www.abfabfemale.com. "Mark your diary 'red' for party days, 'green' for rest days and 'orange' for possible nights out. On each red day, think, 'I'll eat something big and healthy before I go... I'll alternate alcoholic with soft drinks... I'll try to dodge the buffet! (Did you know we eat 65% more than usual at a buffet?)"

If you aim to lose a bit of weight pre-Christmas, Victoria Cleary-Ford, nutritionist for Pure Package, advises this detox diet: "Avoid toxins – sugar, caffeine, nicotine, alcohol and salt – and eliminate dairy and red meat. Base your diet on mineral-rich organic fruit and veg, and eat six smaller meals throughout the day. Start with a fresh-

Avoid A FESTIVE FREAK-OUT

Work parties with people you want to escape from. Ten family dos but only four nice outfits. Your man's mum in your kitchen... Christmas isn't just a time to be jolly – it's also a time to be stropky. "Women put so

much pressure on themselves at Christmas," says Jacqui Day, stress management coach for www.findingcalm.com. "We want to look amazing, buy great gifts and be the ultimate social butterfly. If one isn't perfect, we think everything's a failure." Well, not any more...

fruit smoothie and add a sprinkling of linseed from your local health-food shop – it's rich in mood- and skin-boosting omega 3 and good for your gut. Snack on fruit or seeds, lunch on large, fresh salads with foods like avocado and walnut, or home-made soup, and try fish and steamed veg for dinner."

Stair step-ups, sit-ups and tricep curls help you tone up. And to reduce bloating? Add 50% water to fruit juice and sprinkle Epsom salts in the bath. **STILL BLOATED WITH 24 HOURS TO GO?** Cheat! *Cosmo's* Beauty Editor, Kate Turner, recommends the Universal Contour Wrap, £50-£60, to lose six inches immediately (call 0845 094 9460). Or try a DIY version using The Sanctuary Trim and Tone Body Wrap, £24.99. Or suck it all in with a Yummie Tummie tank top (www.yummie-tumble.co.uk, from £49). >

I'm stressed out already!
Whether it's invite overload or playing paper-scissors-stone to decide where you'll spend Christmas Day, this period is one big balancing act. "I get stressed about it, then feel guilty about my decision," reveals Jane Mansfield, 31, a teacher from Oxford. "So my husband and I trek up and down the motorway to visit both families." Samantha Wheat, 26, a journalist from Dorset, stresses about seeing old friends. "On Christmas Eve, everyone from my old school gets together in the pub. I always think,

"Do I look old? Will they like my clothes?" It freaks me out."
Fix it The answer? Get selfish, says John C Parkin, author of *F**k It: The Ultimate Spiritual Way*. "At Christmas we're supposed to give, but we literally give ourselves away. This year, put yourself first. Don't make excuses. Just say, 'Actually, this year I'd like to...' You'll find your honesty brings a sense of freedom to others too."

As for awkward reunions, the key is caring less about what others think. "Between now and the 25th, do one thing a week that's out of your comfort zone – dance at the office

do, speak in a meeting where you wouldn't normally," says John. "By Christmas, you'll feel so confident those reunions will hold no fear."
STILL STRESSED WITH 24 HOURS TO GO? Repeat the affirmation, "I'm OK, no matter what I'm feeling," to cut out irrational thoughts, and breathe out slowly for double the length of your in-breath.



Make these the only balls you break this Christmas

"Stressed? No, I just can't bear to hear *Mistletoe And Wine* one more time!"



COSMOPOLITAN LOVES CHRISTMAS

3 'I always get run-down'

The party season is so spread out that feeling drained of energy and brainpower is inevitable. "When I go back home to Liverpool for Christmas, I'm hung over from nights out with London friends," says Caroline Yates, 29, an accountant. "Then I have a blowout with my Liverpool mates... then my family. By the 27th, I'm full of booze and zapped of energy."

Fix it Plan your rest breaks. "On two nights a week, stay in, eat well and have a bath with calming jasmine or lavender oil," advises wellbeing guru and founder of NuBeginnings, Victoria Wills.

"To avoid feeling sluggish, eat slow-releasing carbs like brown bread and rice, and leafy greens such as spinach to detox your liver. Flush your system every morning with warm water and lemon, and have a recharging reflexology session."

To combat the ill effects of booze, drink alternate soft drinks, and detox the morning after with Victoria's magic shake: "Blitz 4 stalks of celery, 4 spinach leaves, 2 tomatoes, 3 sprigs of dill, the juice of a lemon and a 1/2cm piece of ginger."

For an instant boost in your energy levels, Victoria says to lie against a wall with your bottom, legs straight up, and your back and head on the floor. **STILL NEED ENERGY WITH 24 HOURS TO GO?** Get some fresh air, or try Vicks Vitality Booster powder (£7.49 for 20). Still tired? Meditate. Lie on the floor and imagine a white shaft of light blasting your tiredness and replacing it with a new store of energy.

4 'It's party time and I look rubbish'

If it's not our energy that flags at Christmas, it's our looks. We just don't feel as gorgeous and sparkly as we should. "I worry about how much alcohol I drink in December because it totally wrecks my skin," admits Lynsey Bushell, 30, a publisher from Cheshire. On top of partying to excess, we're less active, drink less water and ramp up the central heating – leaving our bodies toxin-packed.

Fix it To beat the winter beauty blues, stay active, take multivitamins, eat proteins and have a facial, says Shula Starkey of Ark Health and Beauty. "Always have a seasonal facial to deep-clean skin. Body brushing is a great way to boost your lymphatic system. Five

minutes morning and night – brushing upward towards the heart – followed by a shower and exfoliator containing ginger or menthol, will make you feel fab.

"For undernourished winter hair, use herbal shampoos and conditioners – they're naturally nourishing – and get a scalp and head massage to boost the strength of hair roots.

"For makeup, an illuminating moisturiser will give you a fresh, dewy look – try Mac Strobe Cream, £19.50, with pink or coral on the apple of your cheeks."

As for those hidden-under-tights legs and feet, keep them

as you do in summer: waxed, moisturised, pedicured and tanned – even if it's just a wash-off bronzer. "That way, you can throw on your party dress at a moment's notice and feel *great*."

STILL FEEL A MESS WITH 24 HOURS TO GO?

Cosmo's Kate Turner advises...

● **Complexion:** Massage Origins Never A Dull Moment, £22, over your face to get rid of dead skin cells, then apply Olay Complete Care Multi-Radiance Fluid to enhance the skin's natural glow.

● **Legs:** Have a cool shower and massage in Champneys Chill And Tone Ice Gel, £20, to drain toxins, break down cellulite and leave legs looking slimmer.

● **Hair:** Use V05 Silky Smooth Hot Oil, £3.89. It's enriched with vitamins and shine boosters to transform even the most ravaged hair. ☺

And breathe...

Five instant stress relievers for when it's all getting too much (well, the last one you can do for as long you like...)

1 Hug someone

Hugging reduces the release of stress hormone cortisol. Brain scans have also proved that holding hands gives immediate stress relief, too.

2 Giggle

Watch a two-minute clip of *Flight Of The Goncharis* on YouTube. Laughter is healing and boosts your immune system.

3 Shrug

Most people keep stress in their neck and shoulders. Sit

down, scrunch your shoulders right up to your ears and let them drop, while counting in 10 breaths.

4 Moisturise

Slather on Johnson's Melt Away Stress Body Lotion – its lavender and chamomile scent relaxes both mind and body (www.johnsonsforyou.com).

5 Have sex

Yes, really. When we're having sex, our bodies release a hormone called oxytocin, which has mind-stabilising effects.

Some simple makeup treats can perk up winter skin

