

HOW TO BEAT THE WEEKEND BINGE



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Introduction

I can't wait for the weekend! How many times have you said that, or heard someone else say it? Whether its wishful thinking or a statement of fact, it is the truth.

Even when the weekend is packed with activities, it's often remains the only time when we can kick back, relax, and take a deep breath. The challenge is that it might also be a time when you find yourself stumbling when it comes to good-for-you eating habits

Most dieters know weekends and holiday times present a challenge. On one hand, you want to take part in all the fun things your friends and family are doing; but, on the other, you want to stay within your calorie goals. Often, it can feel difficult to do both.

Of course, the answer isn't to stay home like a hermit all weekend. There should always be room in our lives for some indulgences, but during weight loss, it's too easy to go overboard if we don't plan ahead.



Weekends and public holidays are a time when we all let our hair down a little and perhaps enjoy a few more takeaways, visits to the local beer garden, BBQ's, mince pies, or pumpkin spiced coffees than we normally would.

For most people generally more meat is consumed, which takes more energy to break down than carbohydrates. If we're not chewing it well, or eating too quickly, it might not be broken as effectively and can arrive at the gut partially digested causing bad bacteria to grow on it leading to gut health problems.

There are many reasons why so many people experience digestive problems around these times its mainly it's because we consume so much more food than normal, that take-away curry or Chinese can easily be 2500-3000 calories in one meal. Birthdays and festive holidays can be upwards of 6000 calories for the day, Its no wonder this leaves our digestive systems feeling quite unsettled. As a result, problems like indigestion, constipation and acid reflux can be an unwelcome addition.

While it's not so bad to go off plan over the weekend occasionally, it can add up over time.

Even if you're someone who consistently hits their calorie goals and does the same workout most days, you could gain up to 5kg in one year just by eating 400 extra calories on Saturdays and Sundays.



KEEPING ACTIVE

▶ Planning Ahead

And then Friday comes along. The regular weekday routine disappears, and it takes a good portion of your willpower and good intentions along with it. Between brunches and sleeping in, you make some not-so-healthy choices for a couple of days, and suddenly it seems like all of that progress you made during the week is a distant memory. On Monday morning, you're back at square one. Sound familiar?

Although it's not ideal with so much going on, we may find ourselves occasionally in a position where we miss a normal training session.

We can attempt to counteract this by making sure we are as active as possible throughout the course of the rest of the day. Can we walk the kids to their parties or push the buggy on a long walk? Could we park further away from the shops when we go to the shops? Just a few things like this help to increase our general activity levels (what we call our Non Exercise Activity Thermogenesis) and contribute to burning off a greater amount of calories throughout the day. Don't forget, our energy output matters too!

▶ Maximize Your Time

Often with workouts we only feel like we "did enough" when we've spent an hour in the gym. Often we base our workouts on how destroyed we feel after or on how long we spent working out.

Honestly, neither of those reasons are really good measures of how "good" your workouts was. (Neither is how sore you are the next day, but that is a topic for another day). Because even if you only have 15 minutes and your own bodyweight, you can get in a great workout and make the most of the time you have. These quick workouts aren't the time to bust out those body-building routines, or do isolated movements, or take long rests between exercises or sets.

They are the time to do compound exercises or even hybrid movements. They are the time to do workouts that don't give you a lot of rest between exercises so you can get a lot of work done in the time you have.

A good way to get in a lot of work during the time you do have is to do compound exercises, or even full body moves. You could even try supersets or drop sets to maximise the amount of volume during the time you have in the gym.

This way you can constantly keep moving.

Choose Healthy Activity

You plan errands, get-togethers and leisure activities, why not focus on including a single activity that aligns with your personal health goals, as well? Every week, plan one simple thing that you can do over the weekend to benefit your wellness and feel good about when the following Monday comes around. By scheduling just one activity among all your other plans, you won't get overwhelmed, and that single action could naturally lead to other smart choices.

For instance, if you're feeling stressed out, your activity of choice might be taking a bubble bath or relaxing with a warm cup of tea and a book. If you need to ramp up your weekend exercise, plan on taking a walk, going on a hike or giving ice skating a try. If you're planning a date night, instead of going out for a big dinner, get a couples' massage.

Your weekend doesn't have to derail all of your healthy progress. With some advanced planning and a little creativity, you can ensure that the weekend remains a time for relaxation and recreation without cancelling out a whole week's worth of hard work. Being healthy and staying on track doesn't mean hour-long gym workouts. Actually all you may need is to move more throughout the day.

Not only can this help you improve your posture after sitting hunched over at your desk, but it can also help keep you active and focused on healthy habits during a stressful time of year. It can even help you reduce your stress and not want to indulge in all the candy everywhere around the office.

A great way to add more movement into your day is simply to try and stand or move 1 minute every hour. Or to add in a stretch, even a simple standing doorway chest stretch, every time you get up to go to the bathroom.





Keeping A Schedule

If you find it hard to stay on track over the weekends, you're not alone. Some studies have shown that people tend to consume more calories and exercise less (and thus gain more weight) on weekends than on weekdays.

When you know you're going out to eat with friends and family, look at the menu in advance. That way, you can make a plan and stick to it when ordering. This helps reduce anxiety you might feel about going to a restaurant and what to choose. However, I really stress that you should enjoy the foods that you eat, especially when you're with friends and family, so don't over think it!

It is all about striking a balance. A great way to plan and strike a balance is to write out a schedule ahead of time. Map out the events you want to indulge in and create a meal plan to keep you on track and give you guidance between the events.

If you have healthy meals prepared, you are less likely to fall victim to those delicious treats that always seem to be around – treats that you don't necessarily want, but will indulge in if you don't have healthy food handy or a game plan to stick to.

After all, the weekend represents a hiatus from our regular work roles, giving us more time to rest, relax and spend time with the people and activities we love. Those couple of days often involve more trips to restaurants, parties and other recreational pursuits that are likely to offer food and not always of the healthy variety. Without a timetabled weekday routine, there tends to be more lounging and less movement. The combination can easily derail your diet and cause you to slowly pack on the pounds.



Weekends are notoriously dicey times for weight loss and management. I have had clients who spend all week 'paying' for their weekend indulgences, only to do it again the next week. They are gaining and losing the same three to five pounds over and over, which is unhealthy, self-destructive and unnecessary.

If you find yourself in a similarly frustrating and challenging cycle, know that it's not impossible to break. By taking small steps and being mindful of where you spend your time and calories on the weekends, you can avoid the potential pitfalls of overindulgent weekends.

You don't just have to meet at a restaurant when catching up with friends. Having an active social life is so important for overall health, but it's more difficult to stay on track when eating at restaurants. If you regularly eat out with friends, suggest meeting up for coffee, a walk, a museum tour or a workout class instead.

Keep On Moving & Training

When you're sleeping later and there's no sense of urgency, it can be easy to let a whole weekend slip right past you without participating in any healthy activities. The key is to plan out those activities in advance and tackle them as soon as possible after waking up. Whether it's a group walk with some friends, a new fitness class you've been wanting to try or breakfast at a place that offers nutritious choices, it's important to get a smart start to the weekend before the inevitable distractions creep in.

Once you've done something good for yourself, you will be less likely to indulge in too many 'weekend whatever's'.

Even if your weekend workouts aren't as intense as your weekday ones, they could help you make better food choices. No one wants to feel sluggish when working out. This commitment to your fitness will help you slow down the rounds at happy-hour and scale your food choices to set yourself up for feeling good. Working out on weekends creates structure that will set a tone for the rest of the day.



Although it's not ideal with so much going on, we may find ourselves occasionally in a position where we miss a normal training session. The holiday season or weekends may not be the time to do a super strict program or super long and intense workouts, but that doesn't mean you still can't stay on track.

Maybe these workouts won't be the longest or hardest workouts you've ever done. Maybe the workouts will simply help you maintain and stay active. But plan out workouts that you know you can fit in and do. Give yourself options. If you know you won't make it to the gym, give yourself some home options. Even if your weekend workouts aren't as intense as your weekday ones, they could help you make better food choices. No one wants to feel sluggish when working out.

This commitment to your fitness will help you slow down the rounds at happy-hour and scale your food choices to set yourself up for feeling good. Working out on weekends creates structure that will set a tone for the rest of the day.

Something is better than nothing and keeps you on schedule and consistent even if they aren't ideal.

It doesn't mean you can't still keep moving forward toward your goals. It doesn't mean you just give up till Monday or when the holiday period is over!



NUTRITION

Choose When to Blow Your Calories

With loads of social events happening in the run up to Christmas, it doesn't take a genius to figure out that if we blow our calorie intake at every single one, it will have a more drastic effect on our bodyweight.

However, if we are selective about when we blow our calories and don't do so at every given opportunity, it will make it easier to at least maintain our current composition.

Would you rather have more fun and blow your calories on a night out with friends, or at a boring work do?

This approach means we can be stricter when we need to create a bit of balance for those situations when we're not quite as strict.

Fit people are just as human as anyone else; they still crave their lattes (and maybe need them to get through the morning), but they choose wisely when ordering from Starbucks, Costa or your local coffee shop. Some of them can be loaded with more than the daily recommendation of sugar. They still order that macchiato, but they skip the flavours and chemical-ridden syrups that go along with them. Sorry pumpkin spice, but we'll pass.

Don't skip meals. Even if you're going out for a big dinner, you still need to eat lunch and probably a snack before your night out. If you think you'll skip meals to save up for dinner, you're in for a rude awakening. You'll end up eating more than you would normally and regretting it the next time you step on the scale.

Work functions, family gatherings, kids events - all situations we might find ourselves in when our only food choice is a buffet!

This is an easy opportunity to overdo things, but we can attempt to manage it by just being sensible.

In allowing ourselves just a single trip to the buffet table, it forces us to be more selective of our food choices, and allows room for one or two treat items to find their way onto our plate, without overdoing it.

By then removing ourselves from the immediate environment, we can be less prone to returning for picking up extra or nibbling on leftovers.

Lots of people track what they eat during the week, but come the weekend, they let the habit lag. Don't break a winning streak. The fact is tracking keeps you accountable. If you're the type who doesn't track your weekdays because you always eat the same things and do the same activities, it's all the more important for you to track what you eat and do over the weekend.

Choose Alcohol Wisely

One of the most important things to do is keep an eye on your alcohol intake.

Consuming more alcohol gives our liver more work to do. Amongst hundreds of other roles, the liver is also in charge of fat digestion, so if you're starting to feel a little nauseous after eating fatty foods then it may be time to cut back. Alcohol also contains a lot of empty calories with little to no macronutrient value. At 7 calories per gram, the calories can very quickly add up on a night out.

Alcohol doesn't have to be off-limits when you're trying to lose or maintain your weight, but it's definitely not something you want to consume a lot of. Cocktails can typically exceed an entire chocolate bar in calories, you should view these as a 'treat' rather than a daily occurrence, you wouldn't sit and have 5 or 6 chocolate bars in a row. If you are drinking, choose single alcohols with non-caloric mixers like soda water, tonic water or diet soda. If you have wine, make it a spritzer to expand the volume without extra calories and are typically a much better option than many of the fancy alternatives.

Watch the alcohol. It's easy to overdo the drinking over the weekend. Between dinner out, meeting friends for drinks, or perhaps a party or two, you're likely going to be faced with many alcoholic beverages. Your best bet? Swap one or two alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic ones. Trust me — you'll be happy when you don't have a hangover the next morning.

When socialising, your liver often has to deal with questionable diet choices, changes in body weight, dwindling activity levels and excess alcohol. We can help protect our livers and make this new stress easier on the body.





Hydrating

First thing in the morning is one of the best healthy habits to adopt, and the best way to ensure that happens is to keep a nice tall glass of water on your night stand. It helps cleanse my digestive system and prepare it for the day.

It can do so many good things for you. Staying hydrated is at the top of the list, but it may also help you lose weight. Another reason to go for H₂O? Sugary drinks are linked to obesity and type 2 diabetes. If you aren't a fan of plain water, add flavour with slices of orange, lemon, lime, watermelon, or cucumber.

There are health benefits to drinking more water. It helps keep your temperature normal, lubricates and cushions joints, protects your spinal cord and other sensitive tissues, and gets rid of wastes through urination, sweat, and bowel movements.



Eat Fresh

Despite all the sweet treats on offer during this time, when it comes to your main meals especially, try and ensure you are eating from fresh – colourful fruit and vegetables are especially rich in antioxidants, ideal for supporting your liver.

Keep alcohol within sensible limits, avoid popping pills unnecessarily, such as painkillers, and get outside for some fresh air wherever possible!

Support your liver with herbs – Bitter herbs such as artichoke and dandelion are especially nourishing for the liver, alongside some milk thistle. This is ideal if you've overindulged!

Most people like a drink during social events with friends, but be wary, the alcohol calories can add up and fast!

However, by making some substitutions to what we drink, we can save a huge amount of calories and still enjoy the social aspect of the events we find ourselves in.

An average pint contains around 200-300 calories, by having only a handful of drinks we make a huge dent in our total daily calorie requirements. Compare that to a gin and slimline tonic or a vodka and diet coke, which only contain around 60 or 70 calories, and we save over 100 calories per drink, which will make a huge difference across the course of a night.

Spirits often have the biggest bang for your buck: Just a shot of whiskey, gin or rum is likely to give you a buzz faster than downing beer or wine. They also are the lightest and lowest carbohydrate drinks of the group: A standard shot of whiskey, tequila, vodka, gin, or rum has between 60-90 calories.

Wine isn't the lowest calorie winner but does have some science-backed benefits when consumed moderately. Drinking a glass or two of red wine boosts healthy gut bacteria, which may help reduce cholesterol levels and could even help with, obesity, some research shows.

Along with your Malbec, you can also benefit from a flood of antioxidants or polyphenols derived from grape skins. Polyphenols can help protect the lining of the heart. White wine isn't as helpful health-wise as red wine, but it still has some cardio-protective benefits, research shows

Ultimately, overwhelming research suggests alcohol may do more harm than good. If we're being real with ourselves, the best way to get fit or maintain a healthy lifestyle is by drinking water or soda water.

Still, if you want to drink on a diet, some drinks are definitely healthier than others. Having a drink is like having a dessert — if you can safely drink it's a treat, but one that should be enjoyed in moderation.



Go Into The Weekend Prepared

Having nothing in the fridge is a common reason for ordering take out or eating out several times in one weekend. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday are easy to stay on track because what you prepped for the week is around and fresh. By Thursday and certainly Friday, you are out of prepped foods or you're tired of the leftovers. Plan easy, no-prep dinners for Thursday and Friday that can be made simply with basic, non-perishable ingredients that you can keep stocked in the cupboard or freezer.

You work hard to stick to a healthy routine all week long. You choose and prepare healthy meals, avoid the temptations of junk food and make time for physical activity. A few days in, you're feeling great about the smart choices you've made, and you may even notice some physical changes starting to reflect those efforts.

Then Friday comes along! The regular weekday routine disappears, and it takes a good portion of your willpower and good intentions along with it. Between brunches and sleeping in, you make some not-so-healthy choices for a couple of days, and suddenly it seems like all of that progress you made during the week is a distant memory. On Monday morning, you're back at square one. Sound familiar?

By giving yourself permission to include anything you like into your diet, you'll likely have greater success in losing weight. What you really can expect is feeling less tied to thoughts of food all the time, less struggle when mealtimes arrive, and less self-guilt when something may be more energy-dense than it is nutrient-dense. You'll set yourself up for failure if you forbid yourself from eating your favourite treats. Allow yourself anything you want, but consume a reasonable portion, and don't have it every day. It may help to differentiate foods as "fuel," which are essential to keep your body running, and "fun," which you should only eat for pleasure and enjoyment.

Legalise All Food

One way to make eating healthy on the weekend easier is to allow yourself to have indulgences all week long. Throughout the whole week, it's important to remember that you're allowed to eat anything. When we restrict ourselves completely from foods by labelling them as 'bad' or 'illegal,' things tend to go downhill. Eating a food, we've told ourselves not to sends us into a tailspin. We figure if we've already broken our rule, we might as well just go full steam ahead and start over on Monday.

Instead, consider taking away the rules. Ate a chocolate bar that put you over your calorie goals? It's OK. You're not defeated. You're just ready to move on. Legalizing food actually takes some temptation away and can help prevent a restricting-and-binging cycle.

Pay attention to how often you think of foods as “good” or “bad,” and train yourself to place all foods on a neutral playing field.

Every time you trigger yourself to think a food is ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ grab a pen and paper and actually write down. Candy is just food. Cake is just food. Fruit is just food. Meat is just food. Food nourishes my body. If you need to differentiate foods, so you focus on eating more whole foods and fewer processed ones, consider describing foods by nutrient content.

We can start to look at food as either nutrient-dense, high in protein, fibre and heart-healthy fats or energy-dense, higher in overall calories but [less] nutrient-dense. This way you can look at things with less emotion behind them. You work hard to stick to a healthy routine all week long. You choose and prepare healthy meals, avoid the temptations of junk food and make time for physical activity. A few days in, you’re feeling great about the smart choices you’ve made, and you may even notice some physical changes starting to reflect those efforts.



The 3 Bite Rule

Practice moderation by allowing yourself to have and enjoy indulgences without eating the whole thing. Especially when it comes to dessert, three bites should be enough to savour the flavour without overdoing it.



Cut Yourself Some Slack

Overdid it at a gathering with friends or family? It happens!

Although it’s easy to slip into a guilt cycle, when we attempt to bounce back from over-indulgences by being overly restrictive with our diet, this can often lead to further binges and difficulties in our ability to control ourselves around certain foods.

Consistency is key... Balance is necessary.... But perfection... Perfection isn’t important.

Sometimes slip ups and unplanned for events, especially around the holiday seasons or weekends with all of the temptations and parties, can happen. And the worst thing you can do is beat yourself up over them or let them lead to binges and guilt and giving up on your goals.

Actually, whether it is the holiday season or any other time of year, the best thing you can learn to do is cut yourself some slack when life happens.

That doesn't mean to make excuses or to let one little slip up or unplanned for event make you give up on everything. It does mean, however, that you can indulge and enjoy and just accept that sometimes life happens.

Sometimes you are going to lack the willpower and eat something you didn't want to eat. Sometimes you are going to be just too tired and skip your workout. Sometimes you are going to want to indulge at a party even when you had planned not to.

Final Thoughts

Sometimes things are going to happen and you just have to go with the flow, the worst thing you can do is make yourself feel bad about it. It is best to just enjoy and accept those unplanned for event. Enjoy them and appreciate them and use them to help keep you on track the rest of the time.

Often it is good to even realize that you are eating well and working out so that you are healthy enough to enjoy those life events. Plus reaching your goals is about consistency not perfection. So don't make excuses and let this be a reason for you to give up on your goals, but do cut yourself some slack when life does interfere.

Although we can make some slight alterations to our next-day diet for small over indulgences, when we feel we've really messed up our best bet is to just get ourselves back to normal ASAP. It's much more damaging to dwell on it, rather than accepting that these things happen on occasion and we shouldn't beat ourselves up over it.

No matter what time of year it is, but especially during the holidays or any time you are busy, it is good to make sure you have some small, simple daily and weekly goals to hit.

This helps make your long-term goals seem more manageable and gives you things to focus on every day so that you don't become overwhelmed with achieving your goals. And the simpler you can make these daily and weekly goals, the better off you will be and the easier it will be to stay on track.

Small changes add up to big results so use your daily goals as a way to help instill healthy habits.

These goals don't have to be to eat only chicken and broccoli and workout for an hour. They could simply be drink more water and get up from your desk 5 more minutes during the day than you usually do.

They could be to spend 15 minutes working out. Or they could be to eat all the meals you meal prepped. Keep them simple, especially if you are busy or stressed. You want something realistic that you can accomplish that will get you moving forward but not overwhelm you so that you want to give up or so that you don't actually see progress. Baby steps!

The options are endless, but you just need to have some concrete goals that you can see yourself achieving daily. Not only will hitting these daily goals lead to big results, but it will also help keep you motivated because you will be moving forward and accomplishing something each and every day. And start with small changes and slowly increase as those changes become habits.

It is also best to write these daily and weekly goals down somewhere that you can see them to help hold you accountable. If they are just something you have in your head, you are way more likely to ignore them. So make sure to write them down and even keep them somewhere you are reminded about them throughout the day. This will hold you more accountable and make you more likely to achieve them because they are more tangible.

And then when you do accomplish your weekly or even monthly goals, you need to make sure to reward yourself. Maybe you get a massage or go shopping. Or simply do something to pamper yourself. But whatever you do, recognize your small accomplishments and celebrate them! Celebrating can help keep you on track because it helps you remember to recognize your progress even if you aren't yet at your long-term goals.

It can even be helpful around the holidays to get friends and family involved. Making your goals public or even getting friends together for a little competition can help hold you accountable when you are stressed, tired or simply want to give in and indulge in all the holiday cheer.

No matter what your goals are though or whether or not you share them with friends, you need to set small goals to help keep you on track during the holidays!



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