

Middle management

No need to put stretch pants on your holiday wish list this year. Instead, give yourself the gift of these 15 slimming tricks.

BY MARESSA BROWN | PHOTOS LEVI BROWN

We're blaming this one on Santa. His belly shakes like a bowl full of jelly, yet he doesn't think twice about scarfing cookies and milk. And instead of burning calories by walking briskly from house to house, he lounges in a sleigh while reindeer deliver him by air. With that kind of holiday example, it's no wonder we mortals are getting a little plump.

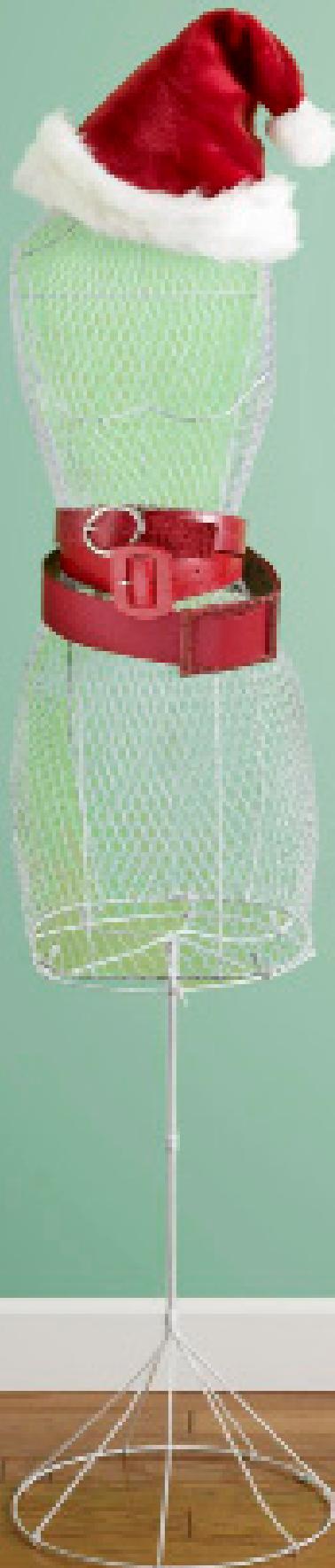
Indeed, one study at Tufts University in Boston suggests that 51 percent of annual weight gain occurs during the brief stretch from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day. Part of the problem is that we eat up to 900 calories more than usual on holidays themselves. On top of that, the average American attends at least four additional holiday parties—often with equally

decadent menus. But it really pays to maintain weight: A study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* shows that even one extra holiday pound can hang around for months, raising long-term obesity risk. The good news: As these women prove, it's possible to dodge the gain.

SHOOT AND SCORE

“At holiday get-togethers in years past, I relied on food to help me cope with social jitters. Then I discovered something better: my camera! Acting as party photographer keeps my hands occupied and gives me the courage to mingle. I even keep a pen and notebook in my pocket to jot down the e-mail addresses of guests so I can send them my photos. It works like a charm—no fruitcake needed!”

Marilyn Santiesteban, 55,
Newton, Massachusetts.
Lost 40 pounds in 2008



**TECH SUPPORT**

“I share my experiences with diet and weight loss on a blog—[fitchick365.com](#)—as well as a Twitter page. I admit, some days this is a challenge. I love eggnog, and I’ve never met a cheese tray I didn’t want to devour. But if I eat it, I Tweet it, and this helps me toe the line. Like anyone, I have good days and bad days; it’s the written record that keeps me from allowing the occasional indulgence to spiral into a whole month’s worth.”

Jennifer Muroff, 45 New York City. *Lost 80 pounds in 2007*

BUDDY SYSTEM

“When it came to baking holiday treats, I had a serious weakness for ‘BLTs’—*bites, licks, and tastes*. I’d sample the batter; I’d lick the spoon; I’d eat the broken cookies. I knew this wasn’t good for my health, so I instituted a no-BLT rule and started baking with my best friend, Cathy. Just *being* with another person made me much more accountable for my actions. And now that I’m nibbling less, I have more goodies to share!”

Kim Bensen, 49 Shelton, Connecticut. *Lost 212 pounds 2001–2003*

SHAKE AND BAKE

“When I know I’ll be serving potato latkes as part of Hanukkah dinner, I move around as much as I can before and after. In fact, I keep an iPod dock in my kitchen and dance to Lady Gaga and Shakira as I’m prepping and frying. It’s so easy to give up and think, *Today is a lost cause because I’m going to pig out*. Staying active at other parts of the day really helps minimize the damage.”

Bethanne Weiss, 44 Lake Mary, Florida. *Lost 15 pounds in 2005*

CLOTHES CALL

“Whenever I need help deciding whether to have a second piece of pumpkin pie, I think of two holiday tops hanging in my closet: One is a bulky red sweater I wore when I was heavier. The other is a beautiful red blouse that was once my ‘goal top’—and fits me perfectly now. Saying yes to the pie would mean saying yes to that old sweater. No, thanks!”

Leeda Bacon, 58 Sacramento. *Lost 75 pounds in 2004*

SWEET SURRENDER

“Maybe this is my rebellious streak talking, but depriving myself of a certain food only makes me want it more. And I know from experience that this increases my chances of bingeing on it. So when spritz butter cookies call my name, I answer the first time! It’s more practical to eat a couple than try to force myself to cut them out completely.”

Carol Leo, 47 Little Ferry, New Jersey. *Lost 30 pounds in 2008*

Four Common Party Pitfalls

1

SKIPPING BREAKFAST THE MORNING OF

This tactic probably won’t lower your overall food intake. In a study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, women who went without an A.M. meal ended up consuming more calories throughout the day than those who woke up to a bowl of high-fiber cereal.

2

LOSING TRACK OF LIQUID CALORIES

As it turns out, the shape of your glass can have a bearing on your tally. Adults observed in a Cornell University study unknowingly poured and drank about 19 percent more juice when given short, wide glasses vs. tall, slender glasses. At a self-serve drink station, reach for the latter to keep yourself in check.

3

CHATTING AT THE BUFFET

Everyone gravitates to the food at a party, but once you’ve served yourself, take your conversations elsewhere. When food is visible *and* within arm’s reach, people are apt to graze mindlessly.

4

LETTING A HEAVY MEAL “SIT”

A single high-fat meal can have an inflammatory effect on the body and even temporarily stiffen blood vessels. But getting aerobic exercise immediately afterward—whether by playing in the snow or taking a brisk walk—can help counter this effect.

Guest at a dinner party? Dine with restraint: People tend to serve decadent food to others— even if they prefer to eat nutritious fare themselves.

SNOOZE CLUES

“One year I put two and two together and realized that when I didn’t get enough sleep, my appetite would go off the rails. For this reason, holiday dinner parties were doubly dangerous. Now I aim to be in bed by 10 p.m. at least three nights a week. This not only keeps my schedule sane and my hunger hormones under control, it ensures I don’t miss out on the true spirit of the holidays by being exhausted and spaced out.”

Laura Fenamore, 47 Kentfield, California. *Lost 100 pounds in 1987*

NATURAL INSTINCT

“Whether I’m hosting or attending a party, I try to choose foods that look like they do in nature—I call it naked cuisine. That means I go for baked sweet potatoes instead of candied or mashed, and roast chicken instead of chicken croquettes. I’ve learned that the simpler a food is, the better it tends to be for my waistline. And it often tastes better, too!”

Beth Sutherland, 51 London, Ontario, Canada. *Lost 35 pounds in 2008*

GOING THE DISTANCE

“Last holiday season was my first one as a runner. And while there’s no doubt the exercise itself keeps me toned, it’s also great because it helps me focus on something other than food. These days, I’m more concerned with chasing the endorphin rush—that’s something no sugar high can beat.”

Lisa Hall, 48 Huntsville, Alabama. *Lost 20 pounds in 2009*

CALORIE-FREE CALM

“I used to handle holiday stress by indulging in comfort foods. It’s hard not to when you’re surrounded by reindeer cookies and chocolate Santas! I always figured, *Whatever. I’ll get back on track in January.* Except I never did, and I ended up putting on more and more weight every year. I finally realized that healthy living is an everyday deal. This year when stress hits I’ll be unwinding with a movie, good book, or manicure.”

Shannon Hammer, 40 Redondo Beach, California. *Lost 100 pounds in 2003*

SIDE VENTURE

“Before a party, I ask the host what she’ll be serving and offer to bring a nutritious complementary dish. If chips and dip are on the menu, I’ll contribute some hummus and whole grain pita crisps to put out. If she’s having chicken in a cream sauce, I’ll bring a whole wheat pasta salad with tons of veggies. This way, the super-rich foods take up only a portion of my meal. Plus, I’m lightening the workload for my host!” ■

Leslie Pardo, 40 Livonia, Michigan. *Lost 22 pounds in 2009*