

beating the winter bulge



As temperatures plummet, many of us seek to hibernate inside our homes, curled up on the sofa engrossed in the latest episode of 'X Factor' or 'Strictly!' We justify missing workouts and eat extra food for comfort and warmth. But hibernating is for bears. Human beings are designed to stay active through all four seasons, yet a poll of 5000 people found that 30% get no exercise at all through the winter months. Don't be one of them and suffer the inevitable winter bulge!

Here are my top ten tips that will enable you to survive the challenging winter months ahead and emerge into springtime with the fitness, body and enthusiasm you want.

1 Eat right for the season
Your body is probably yearning for comfort, for feel-good and warming food and so there's a tendency to reach for stodgy dishes, hot chocolate and other calorie-laden foods. But you can still listen to your body without compromising your diet and you don't have to munch your way through rabbit food either. Eat hearty soups that are broth based but full of healthy chunky vegetables. And enjoy your Sunday roast, again full of plenty of nutrient rich vegetables. Select lean chicken or turkey breast meat and sweet potato in place of your usual roasties.

2 Don't let the cold weather compromise your workout
Ok, so you don't fancy running in the rain and the enthusiasm you had in the summer for early morning bike rides and boot camps has waned as the mornings are dark and cold. Don't despair or beat yourself up about it. You can adapt your workout routine so you don't have to freeze or have the willpower of steel to get fit. Why don't you try circuit training in the comfort of your own home? A high intensity circuit lasting 20 minutes will burn more calories than a low intensity run outdoors anyway do crunches, lunges and squats for example. If you still want to add some brisk walking to your repertoire then head to a shopping mall for some brisk walking and escalator stair climbs. Alternatively, embrace the season and locate an indoor ski slope or ice rink for some weekend fun and fabulous lower body training. I transferred my track running spikes for ice spikes for a season of bobsleigh!

3 Focus on recovery methods for more efficient winter workouts
The cold weather tends to stiffen your muscles and joints, not to mention bring on the sniffles. All of these factors can jeopardise your training and lead to unwanted weight gain. Use the winter months as an excuse to treat yourself to a regular massage and long hot baths. Both will ensure you recover faster and can perform more optimally at every workout.

Use sports recovery drinks containing sodium to help fluid uptake into your muscles and consider taking certain supplements to enhance your muscle recovery and repair. A good multivitamin is essential during the winter months and omega 3 fish oils will help joint and cell function. Magnesium and L-carnitine are great for raising energy levels and assisting workout recovery enabling you to work harder and more frequently to burn off any extra pounds.

4 Workout in the correct winter clothing to maximise your efforts
Wearing too much or too little clothing whilst exercising can compromise your mobility in the first instance and affect the blood flow to your extremities in the latter. If you're exercising outside the key is to wear layers. Layering provides the best heating method and allows you to strip layers as your body temperature rises. Select longer layers with a breathable mesh to allow the moisture from sweat to evaporate from your skin without leaving your skin wet, which will cause a chill.

5 Survive the Winter Party Season
There tend to be more parties to attend in the autumn/winter – there's Halloween, Thanksgiving (if you're

Stateside), 'office dos', Christmas and then the New Year. All spell out eat, drink and sleep followed by a mad panic to get back in shape in the New Year. But why do so much damage when you can survive the party season with a few simple tricks and still have fun. Here are my suggestions:

- * If you know you'll have a good three courses of food, not to mention a little alcohol (!), then make sure you do your workout before you go. You'll feel much better about yourself and actually less likely to overindulge and ruin your efforts.
- * Have a healthy snack, such as some fruit and nuts before you go out, to prevent hunger and late night serving times causing you to gorge on the roasted nuts and nibbles.
- * Alternate any alcoholic drink with a soft drink, water would be advisable, to reduce the total consumed and bring your calorie intake down. Better still, avoid alcohol altogether, if you're serious about your training.

6 Pin up your summer bikini body photos!
It's easy in the winter, when you're wearing multiple layers to worry less about an extra biscuit or missing a workout compared to in the summer, when every inch of skin could be on show. So, pin up a photo of your beach wear clad bod to remind yourself of the shape you want to stay in, or indeed get into, during the winter months.

7 Exercise during the day
As night-time comes early in winter, get outside for some brisk walking or interval running if possible. Perhaps use your lunch breaks or make the effort at the weekend. Going outside in the day can improve your mood and thus motivation to workout because of the sun, as well as the endorphins you produce because of exercise.


8 Focus your mind
 Winter training requires a little more planning and motivation. Imagine every scenario that may prevent you from doing your outside activities or heading to the gym. It might be the rain or cold, the extra traffic on the road or even the perception that it's later than it is in the evening because of the earlier sunset. Play every scenario through in your mind and imagine how you can overcome these obstacles. How would you feel if you made these excuses? Probably guilty and full of promises to try harder next time. Then imagine the feeling of achievement and satisfaction from battling these obstacles and sticking to your plan. These feelings should become your motivating factor. Nobody likes to feel like they've let themselves down in any walk of life.


9 Get a good night's sleep
 Simply getting a good night's sleep can prevent winter weight gain. It's well documented that a lack of sleep can increase body fat. This is because when tired your body produces excess cortisol, the stress hormone that prevents fat mobilisation, leading to fat storage and cravings for sugar. So my advice is to capitalise on the early nightfall by getting to bed early for some fat busting shut eye! This may also afford you some extra hours of Christmas partying at the weekend!



10 Go for a swim
 Swimming is one of those activities that's not affected by the season. The pools are open all year round and the water temperature is regulated. Swimming is also non-weight bearing and therefore protective of stiff, cold joints. My tip to avoid endless and boring continuous lengths is to interval train. Try

swimming 2 fast lengths, resting for 60 seconds and then repeating for as many sets as you can manage. Alternate strokes and use a float to do arm only and leg only efforts.

So there you have it – my winter survival guide. There's no need to suffer the annual weight-gain cycle that so many people come to accept. Make this (and the soon to follow next) year as the one to break the cycle and maintain your summer body all year long. You'll thank yourself when you read my next 'Beach Body Ready' article!! 



Caroline Pearce is a former International athlete and fitness and nutrition consultant. She is the director of JustSlim, the online weight loss programme that creates a personalised nutrition plan for you, giving you the body and energy you need to enjoy your life, whatever life throws at you. You can access your JustSlim plan online anytime, anywhere.
 Go to: www.CarolinePearceJustSlim.com



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