



Parties, family visits, shopping... during the festive season it can be hard to grab free time, and when you do, the last thing you feel like doing is heading to the gym. Especially when the sofa is looking so darned appealing... It's really no wonder 34 per cent of us stop exercising over Christmas. But it's a more important time than ever to stay motivated: it takes 14 hours of jogging to burn off the calories the average Brit consumes on Christmas Day – a staggering 7,000! So, beat the urge to slob out with our festive fight-back plan.

* EMBRACE THE COLD

Research shows we benefit more from exercising outdoors when temperatures drop than we do in the heat. 'Our bodies tolerate activity better in the cold,' says Nigel Ilsley of British Military Fitness (BMF). 'We can exercise for longer and burn more fat.'

* WALK IT OFF

To stay inspired, try a new exercise like Walkfit from BMF, a class that makes the most of your local park. The aim is to up your heart rate, use your muscles and improve mobility, and it's a fun, social class too, so grab your friends or family and bid the sofa goodbye. The first introductory class is free; visit www.walkfit.co.uk for more information.

* STAY SOCIABLE

'Committing to meet your friend at the gym or at an exercise class really keeps you motivated and gives you an extra reason to get up and go,' says Gillian Reeves, national group exercise manager at Virgin Active health clubs. 'Plan your sessions in your diaries together, and set yourselves reminders on your phones or email, and you'll have no excuses to drop out!'

* GET TWO-FOR-ONE

No time for a toning class *and* a weights session? Pilates is the answer. 'Classes should combine the core-strengthening and muscle-lengthening benefits of traditional Pilates, with the toning effects of resistance training – it'll rapidly sculpt your whole body,' explains Tasnim Bokhary, founder of Pilates HQ.

* FOCUS ON A FROCK

'It's amazing how that sparkly new Christmas party dress can motivate you to go for a run or workout, especially if it's a little bit tight!' says Jenny Blewett, designer for Sweaty Betty. Try hanging yours on the outside of your wardrobe door for inspiration.

* STRETCH IT OUT

If the thought of doing a dynamic form of exercise leaves you feeling exhausted before you've started, try yin yoga. 'It focuses on postures that work deep in the connective tissues and uses breath to boost energy systems,' says Victoria McClelland, product director of Wellbeing Escapes.

* MULTITASK

As you brush your teeth twice a day, why not use the time wisely? Place legs shoulder-width apart and do some squats while you brush. A minute of cleaning your teeth twice daily means nearly a quarter of an hour of squats per week. So tone up your bum and thighs and get brushing!

* GET ON THE PHONE

With so many social events going on at this time of year, you're likely to be on the phone a lot making plans (or, even more likely, dissecting the night before!). Use this time to tone up: buy a resistance band to tie to your doors or drawers, then work out as you chat! ☑

Stick it to the sofa!

Feel the need to flop out during the festive season? Forget it. With these top tips you'll never succumb to the sofa again, says Amanda Bown

* GET FIT FOR FREE

Forget the gym – Ravi Viethivaloo, head of fitness at Grayshott Spa, says all you need for hot abs is a towel: 'Place it on the floor and lie on your back two inches from the top, knees bent. Hold the top two corners of the towel behind your head, keeping elbows in line with knees, and slowly pull your torso upwards. Repeat ten times. Then take your left hand, still holding the towel, and bring it to your right knee. Swap hands and repeat.'

* FIND YOUR CHI

Clear out those festive cobwebs by taking up t'ai chi. A study has found this slow, meditative exercise is great for reducing stress levels and boosting self esteem. What's more, the moves retrain your posture, improve circulation and keep joints flexible – not bad for an hour's work! Find your nearest class at www.taichifinder.co.uk

