



I'm having the time of my life, so why then, do I feel so sluggish?" It's a question asked by many of us as we celebrate our way through the holiday season. You may think it's all the carbs, trans fats or late nights that have been zapping your energy, but the culprit might be more unusual: your body's acid levels. "Most of the food we indulge in over the Christmas period is very acidic because it's highly processed, full of sugar or involves alcohol," says Tania Grasseschi, Chinese medicine practitioner (orientalwisdom.com.au). "An acidic body is a great environment for the growth of viruses and bacteria, leading you to feel tired, toxic and sick." So, how do you bounce back? The solution, happily, is simple.

HOW TO BECOME MORE ALKALINE

The first lesson starts with getting a handle on what is alkaline and what isn't. "The mistake most people make is thinking it's about avoiding foods that taste acidic," says naturopath Mim Beim (beamingwithhealth.com.au). "Rather than the taste, it's actually about the mineral composition of the food after it's been absorbed that determines whether it's acid-forming or alkaline."

Step one: Eliminate, or at least heavily reduce, the following: proteins (particularly red meat); dairy (except ricotta, which is alkaline); sugars; alcohol; caffeine; grains; and processed foods.

Step two: Replenish your diet with these alkaline foods: fresh fruit; fresh juices; seeds and nuts; herbs; large helpings of vegies – particularly the green and leafy variety, such as spinach.

Step three: Dr Simone Laubscher, Elle Macpherson's nutritional doctor and co-founder of nutrition at Rejuv Physio & Nutrition (rejuv.co.uk), advises kicking off your mornings with a glass of warm water and lemon juice, plus "add an additional two litres of water per day to help dilute acids".

Step four: Keep coffee to a maximum of one cup a day, which "you'll need to drink at least one hour away from any nutritious foods or supplements, so the caffeine doesn't impair absorption of key alkalising ingredients", says Dr Laubscher.

Step five: Increase exercise and reduce stress. "Sweat acts as a great back-door way to dump acid wastes and toxins," explains Dr Laubscher. Plus, stress-management techniques, such as meditation, are very beneficial. "When you are stressed,

your digestive system switches off so you need to find ways to relax and aid your body," says Grasseschi. And if you really can't say no to that leftover mince pie? Try throwing back a green smoothie packed with celery, apple and spinach alongside it, advises Beim. After all, eating well – whether it's about alkalinity or not – is simply about balance.

WHAT IS THE ALKALINE DIET?

The diet has been around for some 30 years, but the spotlight was firmly put on "keeping alkaline" last year when supermodel Elle Macpherson confessed that she always carried a pH balance urine tester kit in her purse to check she maintains "an alkaline state".

Despite the urine kit, the premise of the diet is pretty simple: strike a balance of eating 70–80 per cent alkaline-rich foods like leafy greens, fruits and vegetables and 20–30 per cent acid-forming (protein, dairy and grains). If you do, you'll create a pH balance in your body that is optimal for health, reducing the risk of chronic illness and disease, while increasing your energy and helping you shift unwanted kilos.

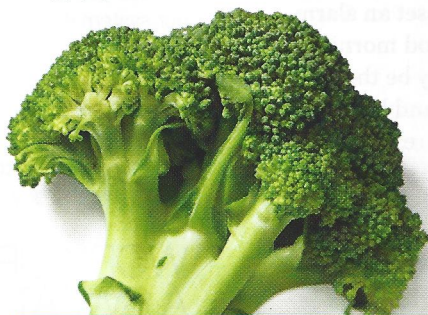
Although many nutritionists have dismissed the diet, arguing that the body has its own natural system for keeping the balance in check, studies have shown diets overloaded with processed foods and animal proteins might be capable of overriding our systems.

A 2013 French study* of 60,000 women found those with highly acidic diets had a higher risk of type 2 diabetes, while a Japanese study** linked those with high-acid diets to a higher risk of insulin resistance.

But Grasseschi is an alkaline fan. "When your body is alkaline, you are better able to absorb nutrients from the food you eat and your blood is more highly oxygenated so you will have boundless energy, your immune system will be strong, and you will automatically feel happier within yourself," she says, adding that there's no better time to start than after the Christmas binge.

80
The percentage of alkaline foods to aim for in your diet.

7.4
The ideal pH level for the human body. Less than 7 is considered acidic.



Your detox starts here ...

If you're keen to challenge yourself over a five-day period, say between Christmas and NYE, Dr Laubscher recommends going entirely vegan to accelerate the body's ability to detox and rebalance your pH. "Cut all meat, dairy, sugar and gluten and head over to Welleco.com for a range of excellent detox vegan recipes," she says.

For a 10-day plan, which isn't as strict, Grasseschi suggests the following:

- Refrain from eating red meat, processed food, sugars, and refined flours, such as in bread and pasta. A single daily serve of a wholegrain like quinoa is allowed, as is lean white protein, such as fish.
- Increase intake of fresh vegetables and fruit.

- Swap fatty and fried foods for good oils, such as avocado, coconut oil and nuts and seeds.
- Drink plenty of spring water, lemon water, dandelion and rooibos teas.
- Abstain from alcohol and cigarettes.
- Practise meditation and deep breathing.
- Exercise daily. □