

How to have your Christmas cake – and eat it!

For me the kitchen is a place of aesthetic beauty. Beautiful, gleaming appliances next door to etched glass cake domes covering temptation. It is a place to be enjoyed.

My kitchen is not a place I toil. So it is just as well that to date I have trained up two husbands to be perfectly at home in the kitchen. It is not that I have no interest. I adore hardbacked cookbooks, sleeves removed and I dream about owning my own tearoom with a confectioners counter but when it comes to survival I have willingly surrendered all decision making to an expert in the kitchen. My husband.

My granddad may be responsible for this. I trust a man in a kitchen. Ahead of his time as a master baker, he was always to be found in the kitchen. I can see him now holding a piping bag made of greaseproof paper painstakingly icing an elaborate wedding or christening cake. My grandparent's larder was always full. Granddad would warn us that glass jars could cause injury should they fall from a great height. Although death by icing sugar always sounded very appealing. This was his gentle attempt to save his delights from our sticky fingers. Fortunately the glacé cherries and almonds were housed lower down.

Growing up, it was perfectly normal to tip toe around my grandparents home aware that a work of art was in the making. Charging through doors was not encouraged. The cakes would sit one tier under the other on a trolley in their own little quarter by the front door keeping cool. My granddad was from the age of crinoline ladies.

I admire a man who is a great cook especially when I am the recipient, and I am not alone. The Great British Bake Off had three male finalists. Paul Hollywood the baker with the piercing blue eyes could persuade us all to melt into a Victoria sponge.

Savouring the delights of festive food is now upon us. I began guzzling mince pies in October and fruit cake is my middle name. But here is the rub – come January there is a stampede and where is it heading? To the nearest place of torture in the eyes of those swept in. For those unfortunates who believe that overindulgence can be remedied in one hit



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– or put more accurately three months of tears – January is a miserable month.

It does not need to be this way. Balance is all that is needed. Eat a mince pie – do some press ups. Succumb to some sherry trifle – run up and down the stairs. Now clearly there are practical implications to all of this and it will not always be appropriate to drop to the floor and do two sets of 12 press-ups not least because that mince pie may make an unwanted appearance but the idea is forming.

Energy in – energy out. If you are in the habit of eating such quantities that sleep seems the only option then what are you doing, apart from eating too much? Food is energising, even the wicked variety. Use it. I will often issue a warning to class if I have fuel to burn. They visibly pale but it should be the case that you want to expand your energy with your improved vitality. Not use it as a reason to sit still or worse sleep.

With a choc-a-bloc social diary you may be finding it difficult to fit your exercise in during your oh-so-hectic week of evening entertainment. So I have looked into the science for you and have some very good news.

It is said that if you do one hour of exercise – ex-er-cise: activity requiring physical effort – before breakfast every day for 10 days you could lose around a pound and that the experts say is exactly how you should lose weight. Or during the festive indulgences you could just keep your weight in check. Not with the intention of losing weight, just not putting it on. No expanding middles in sight. It would allow you to have a very merry Christmas with all the trimmings.

I hear you cry: one hour before breakfast – how? Well, breakfast is breaking a fast and can be eaten at a time of your choice. The scientists are saying that exercising before your fast ends will be more effective than after it. I know from my own experience that you will have plenty of energy in store.

Then come January you will not feel the need to join that stampede. Instead you can saunter into the New Year not looking for the 'new you' but being perfectly happy keeping the one you've got.

Merry Christmas to you all. ☺