

# Gwyneth's diet diary

Our readers' favourite, 52-year-old Gwyneth Watson has vowed not to pile on the pounds over the festive season. But how will she handle the challenges of chocolate and Christmas cake?

## February 2010

The first obvious sign of Christmas I experienced was when I stood in a shop queue, ignoring every variety of gift-packaged chocolate, and the assistant asked: "Can I interest you in half-price giant bars?" I said: "Yes, I am interested, but only on condition that you ring up Rosemary Conley and tell her that it is your fault." She gave me a very funny look along with my magazines and change. I was triumphant, chocolate-less and didn't care what she thought!

I knew Christmas was truly coming the day when I sadly acknowledged to myself that I had put on another pound and also received an invitation from a client to a posh "do" in Glasgow. It meant wearing a "little" black number, preferably without the stomach paunch.

I dug out my Krisprolls instead of pudding. These are my friends. I love them because they take a long time to eat and are only 48 calories each. The dog loves them, too (perhaps they remind him of Bonios), and he drooled all over the new leather sofa in anticipation of treats to come.

## Recipe for success?

I started preparing for Christmas by getting out all of Rosemary's recipe books and finding the festive recipes that I could freeze ahead. In a moment of weakness, I treated myself to a pudding steamer. This is an expensive way of clamping a lid on a basin rather than tying up cloth with string and steam-burning yourself for your efforts. Nothing says that the contents have to be treacle sponge. I surprised myself by making a low-fat Christmas pudding from Rosemary's Christmas cookbook.

Last time I attempted to make a pudding was about 15 years ago, when water seeped in the pan and the contents were mouldy when unveiled.

Boosted by success, I went on to follow the recipes for meringue Yule log and filo pastry mince pies. Have you ever worked with filo pastry?

There was a helpful tip to cover the pastry with a damp cloth while working. By the time I had lovingly arranged layers in the tin, the bottom of the stack was completely soggy - and I wasted half of it. Then, I cooked the creations until they were golden brown. More of the pastry was wasted trying to get the things out of the tin. However, I achieved what I set out to do.

Graham wanted to know if I intended serving them with clotted cream. I didn't reward him with an answer.

## Gwyneth's diet diary cont:

### Easy as pie

Next, I decided to make a huge steak and ale pie. A neighbour knocked on the door during all this culinary activity, and was very impressed with the smell, and that there is more to me than a pretty face (or to quote my Mother: "You are not so green as you are cabbage-looking").

Next, I read Rosemary's recipe for low-fat Christmas cake. Sorry, Rosemary, but I laughed disrespectfully at the suggestion to keep calories down by replacing marzipan and icing with a pretty ribbon and a sprig of holly. Tell that to my family on Christmas Day!

I compromised by making the recipe with only 2 ounces of almonds and then iced only the top of the cake. I stupidly bought ready-made roll-on icing, and managed to crack that, then tried to smooth the crack with a palette knife. I should have stuck to my usual trick of making my own icing "snow" with a fork, and plonking something festive-looking in the middle.

I froze the remnants of marzipan, so that I would not be tempted to have a nibble every time I opened the fridge. On reflection, I don't actually know what I have saved this for, so I have binned the rest of the icing. It's wasteful, but safer in the long run.

### Going for the burn

Another ploy to keeping the weight down (or at least not to add to the burden) was to bring out the much-loved aerobic DVDs. Yes, I know it has been a long time since I have mentioned them, but we bought a new telly with funny cables I don't understand, had the room decorated, and it meant having to change my clothes and jump up and down a lot, and the wood-burning stove was lit more often, so it was too hot to exercise... and all the other excuses you have heard before, and the momentum lapsed.

The trick was to get back into serious exercising before Christmas and not wait until January. Fat Attack is still my favourite DVD, on the basis that it tires me the most, so it must be good!

Luckily, the latest magazine arrived in a timely manner, allowing me to order Rosemary's new DVD ready to start the New Year. It also contained festive recipes, but eventually I had to stop cooking low-fat food as the freezer was full (mostly of frozen vegetables grown in the summer) and I ran out of freezer-to-oven containers.

### Son shines

James rang, following his move back to the Midlands, to tell me that he had taken action as a result of agreeing with his new GP that he (James) was overweight. He had joined a Rosemary Conley class, and won Slimmer of the Week for losing 4lb! He reeled off all the healthy food that he had been eating. The air was blue in

## Gwyneth's diet diary cont:

this house, as Graham and I have spent 7 years trying to get anything that vaguely resembles fruit or a vegetable down his neck! Also, James has spent many an hour on the sofa, watching me exercising, without feeling the least need to join in.

Apparently, he is the only man in the class, and I think he is milking this situation for all it is worth! It remains to be seen what he eats when he is home.

## Hidden extras

Nothing beats the run-up to Christmas Day. I am such a sucker for tradition - and that includes hearing Chris Rea's Driving Home for Christmas on my "present run" down the M6 and O, Holy Night, preferably sung by Il Divo - to put me in a charitable frame of mind.

I spent December in a whirl of trying to get work out of students, buying, wrapping and delivering presents, writing lists of lists so that I didn't forget things and doing everything possible to be superwoman, Santa and saintly at the same time. Along the way there were the inevitable extras - buffet at our awards ceremony, dinner and wine at a business do; chocolates brought in by grateful clients; mince pies by the dozen as Greggs started selling Christmas items in November along with the tomato soup; staff night out - the full Christmas dinner; coffee and biscuits (or wine and nibbles) when I dropped in to see friends, more when others dropped in to see me, and 4 days of inappropriate eating when I was away from home.

That's all before the official festivities started! The early morning aerobics went pear-shaped when I caught a cold and had only the energy to summon the breath to keep me alive.

## Happy Christmas

Once I had finished work, I could truly unwind and prepare for Christmas, with 2 out of 3 of our boys home, plus Granny nodding quietly in the corner. Still, while she was asleep, she was not dipping into the tin of chocolates. Strangely, the chocolate fairies must have been around, as they all gradually disappeared.

I tried working out how many calories were in the tin, at an average of 50 per chocolate, but it made my head and conscience hurt too much.

Well, I improved on last year, by not buying pork pie, crisps and various cheeses. No one actually asked for them - perhaps they didn't dare. And I didn't put chocolates on the tree, nor did I buy "extra" edibles as presents. We certainly didn't starve, and all the low-fat dishes were well received and delicious.

If I am lucky, I shall be able to parcel up leftovers for our youngest son to sustain him on his way back to Heathrow.

I expect you have looked at the bottom of this article to see how much weight I have put on over the Christmas period. I am not telling you. There's no point being negative and depressing other people!

## Gwyneth's diet diary cont:

I am grateful for the good things (including food) that we have shared as a family, and sign off with another of Rosemary's wise sayings: "You don't fail until you give up". Here's to 2010!

### top tips

- Break a bad habit - just one at a time will make a difference.

### high points

- Resisting (some) fattening foods.
- Planning and making low-fat meals, and feeling in control.
- Dancing on a night out and not overeating.

### low points

- Dressing up and wishing I had lost more weight sooner.
- Finding it harder to dodge the aisles full of foods that are high in fat and sugar.
- Realising that most of the "treats" I have bought for Christmas are nutritionally worthless.

### what I have learned

- I am a creature of habit, but habits can be changed.
- I feel better after exercise but I need to plan it into my day.