

Give your liver a break too

Yes, it is the season of excess. But that doesn't mean you have to suffer the consequences the morning after the night before. With a little preparation and good nutritional support for your liver, you can minimise the effects of overindulgence.

As the body's largest organ, the liver has more than 500 different functions.

One of its chief roles is to detoxify our bodies. It acts as a recycling centre, breaking down harmful toxins and packaging them up for elimination from the body.

Besides alcohol and drugs, too much smoking, caffeine, stress, sugar, fat and a poor diet can also put extra strain on your liver.

Adding these liver-friendly foods to your regular diet will support your liver to function optimally:

- Cruciferous vegetables like broccoli, cabbage, Brussel sprouts, radishes and kale are rich in phytochemicals that boost the liver's detoxification pathways and help it to break down fats.

- Onions, shallots, garlic, asparagus and eggs provide important sulphur compounds that help to cleanse the liver.

- Dark green leafy vegetables are packed with fibre, antioxidants and amino acids required for



■ Wine puts a strain on the liver

Picture: PA

detoxification. Rocket, watercress and spinach will stimulate bile flow, vital for breaking down and removing fats and toxins.

- Turmeric is the king of liver boosting spices, but ginger, cinnamon and liquorice all support liver function too.

- Drinking warm water with a couple of slices of lemon, especially first thing in the morning, will kick start your liver and set you up for the day.

As well as nourishing your liver with liver-friendly foods throughout the year, there are specific supplements that you can take for support before and after a big night out.

The day before, take a vitamin B complex, magnesium and zinc.

These nutrients are required by the enzyme that breaks down alcohol and optimising your levels of them will ensure that the liver has all it needs to function properly once the drinking begins.

During the party, stay adequately hydrated by drinking plenty of water.

If you are serious about avoiding a hangover, you could drink an electrolyte solution like Emergen-C or E-Lyte halfway through the evening.

Alcohol dehydrates you and, in addition to peeing out water, you will be losing valuable electrolytes.

Low levels of electrolytes like sodium and potassium can lead to hangover symptoms of headaches, nausea and fatigue.

When you get home, take some milk thistle, a powerful herb that is a natural pain reliever and helps the liver to flush out toxins.

Another dose of vitamin B complex, magnesium and zinc will be helpful too. If you're feeling nauseous, try the homeopathic remedy Nux Vomica.

Repeat these supplements the following morning and you should be ready to face the world with bright eyes and a thankful liver.

■ Sarah Walford is a nutritionist based in NW3. For more information, or to arrange an appointment, visit www.nw3nutrition.com.

Learning hip hop – the easy way

For some, dancing comes naturally. I am not some. Aged seven, my friend Caitlin took me to an open house at her Irish dancing studio – a popular activity for young girls in suburban Chicago – and, after several minutes of flailing, I was asked to sit to the side to avoid hurting myself or others. A swift end to a less-than-promising career in dance.

Since then, it's been a bit daunting for me to attempt any form of organised choreography – mainly since I've never found it accessible for beginners. But, recently, my editor asked me if I'd like to try joining 4 Foundations, a dance class which teaches the foundations of hip-hop dance to adults.

Co-directors Louisa Andrea and Damien Anyasi created the class earlier this year as a part of their dance company, B-Better, which teaches hip-hop dance to all ages, including adult beginners.

"We like to think the format we teach is accessible to everyone," explains Andrea. "We teach moves rather than dances and instruct people how to express themselves through freestyle."

When I walked into class at the Winchester Project in Swiss Cottage, everyone was already

overthink just about everything. But Damien, who choreographed the breakdancing section of the 2012 Olympic opening ceremonies, recognised I was struggling and came over to help. "Watch me," he said, reassuringly. "Keep this leg still and put all your weight on it. Then when you pull the other one back, your knee will pop automatically. Let your body do the work."

Progress

And suddenly, it was really easy. I learned a whole dance move! I suppose it's nothing too amazing – but it is progress.

Many students and people in their 20s and 30s have also joined the project as beginners and have found it a challenging but enjoyable experience, says Andrea.

"Some were kind of apprehensive. We've had tears of joy, tears of frustration – but, overall, it's been a good experience."

I would encourage anyone with even an inkling of interest in hip-hop dance to try this class. It's the perfect way to challenge yourself and test your own limits.

Mary Kate Brogan

■ For details about B-Better, visit



Exotic treats

Trust me, few women would be disappointed by a clutch of REN products under the tree this Christmas.

The "clean" skincare range, which prides itself on eliminating parabens, sulphates, silicones and other nasties, perfumes its products with delicate natural ingredients such as mayblossom, neroli and Moroccan rose otto, one of the world's most expensive oils.

The heady rose scent certainly lends the best-selling range a luxurious feel and, with this year's gift sets featuring an Arabesque pattern derived from Islamic art, the entire package is beautifully exotic and indulgent.

Sets for men and women start at £15 including the rose experience gift (£32), which includes 100ml bottles of body cream and body wash, a bath oil that soothes dry and sensitive skin and an ultra moisture body oil that leaves the