

Researcher unpacks the perils of a supersized Christmas dinner

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Are you really going to eat a whole oversized roast turkey? Are 38 cans of soft drink more than plenty? Should you buy six packets of Christmas pudding just to get an extra one free? These are the sort of questions UniSA's Zero Waste SA Research Centre (sd+b) wants you to ask before visiting the supermarket this festive season.

According to UniSA PhD candidate and researcher, Atiq Zaman, figures indicate not only are we habitually wasteful, but more food is wasted during the summer holiday period than at any other time of the year.

In a typical week in Australia, the average household waste 20 to 25 per cent of the weekly food purchased.

“In Australia food waste is produced at around 197kg per year per household for a total of three million tonnes per year worth \$5.2 billion, and a related UK study suggests we produce 80 per cent more waste around [Christmas](#) and New Year which seems to be emulated in Australia,” he says.

Zaman says food consumption and the consequent food waste is one of the largest ways individuals contribute to greenhouse gas emissions.

“The average Adelaidean produces 19 tonnes of greenhouse gas every year and food contributes 23.3 per cent - the highest contributor to greenhouse gases,” says Zaman.

He says meat is one of our most frequently discarded foods and also one of the food products Australians consume in larger amounts each year compared to other nations.

“The average person in the industrial world currently eats about 220 grams of meat a day and Australians consume more than 300 grams a day,” he says.

Many love to buy a meat tray to cook on the barbeque on a hot summer's day, but Zaman says we need to think more carefully about how much we will actually eat rather than waste.

“To produce a one kilo of beef steak, over a life cycle it takes 15,500 litres of water and 70 kilowatts of energy – that's how much we can potentially save by not consuming so much,” he says.

Zaman attributes much of the wastage to a social mentality associated

with food where more is better and retailers' push for customers to "upsized" their purchases through weekly specials.

"We shouldn't be influenced by marketing strategies when it comes to buying food, we should stick to what we intend to buy and not be swayed to buy more food because it is on special," he says.

"If you looked in your freezer you would find more food than you really need.

"There are people who are dying from hunger in East Africa, while we are throwing half a dozen chops in the trash. We need to think about the environmental and humanitarian consequences of our waste."

Five tips for not wasting food this festive season include:

1. Avoid over shopping – plan your Christmas party with a list of food and quantities needed, resist the specials aimed at making you purchase more.
2. Avoid waste during processing – develop a system in the kitchen to collect leftover food while preparing meals rather than using the garbage bin destined for landfill.
3. Preserve food – drying, refrigeration, freezing, adding salt or sugar, canning, and bottling can all add to the length of food life.
4. Share with the neighbors – if you can't eat or preserve it then offer to your neighbour and grow that social connection.
5. Recycle – an active compost bin to compile [food](#) scraps reduces

emissions, fertilizes soil and protects our environment.

Provided by University of South Australia

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