

How to eat healthy during the holidays

With the holiday season fast approaching, it's time to start planning ahead to create delicious, heart-healthy holiday meals. All it takes is some recipe modifications, clever substitutions, and healthy choices to make your holidays merry and light.

Start your holiday festivities off on the right foot by offering a healthy appetizer course, including:

- An assortment of unsalted nuts, fiber-rich crackers and low-fat cheeses.
- A fresh fruit or vegetable tray with low-fat dips or hummus.
- Shrimp or scallops with cocktail sauce or lemon.

Reduce the fat and calorie content of these popular holiday foods with these easy substitutions:

- Choose white meat versus dark meat, and always remember to remove the skin off the turkey.
- Reduce the amount of fat in stuffing by replacing sausage or ground beef with soy-based proteins or dried fruits such as cranberries, raisins or apricots.
- Try fat-free evaporated milk to make mashed potatoes more creamy or low-sodium chicken broth to give them more flavor.
- Instead of candied yams, bake sweet potatoes with apples for sweetness.
- Fried onion rings and full-fat cream of mushroom soup can add extra fat to green bean casserole. Substitute with slivered almonds and reduced-fat soup.

And try these sweet substitutions for your holiday desserts:

- Reduce the amount of sugar and enhance "sweetness" by adding more vanilla, nutmeg or cinnamon.
- Reduce the amount of fat by substituting unsweetened applesauce, prune puree or mashed banana for oil, butter or margarine.
- Choose a graham cracker crust instead of a traditional dough crust.

Don't look back on the holidays with regret. These simple strategies can keep you from overindulging and packing on the holiday pounds:

- Do not skip meals, particularly breakfast, as this may result in overeating.
- Use a smaller plate as this will encourage proper portion sizes.
- Make just one trip to the buffet line or wait 10 minutes before going back for seconds to see if you are really still hungry.
- Fill your plate first with vegetables, fruits and salad before the entrees or desserts.
- Move socializing with friends and family away from the buffet or appetizer table to minimize unconscious nibbling.

A great way to finish your holiday meal is by encouraging family and friends to participate in some physical activity. Spending time dancing, playing football or taking a walk with your loved ones will produce lasting holiday memories for years to come.