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While it might not be realistic to make all of your holiday recipes healthy, incorporating just a few of the ideas in this publication will have a positive impact on your health! You can also carry the lessons into your everyday eating habits by making simple swaps, watching your portion sizes, and eating more fruits and vegetables before, during, and after meals to get lots of nutrients and to help you feel full!

The Role of Nutrition on Our Health

Food and Nutrition Services

Healthier Holiday Meals

Did you know the average American consumes approximately 4,500 calories and 229 grams fat from eating a traditional holiday dinner? That works out to be about 2 whole days worth of calories and 3 days worth of fat in just one meal! Not to mention that many people will also eat breakfast, lunch, and snacks on holidays.



Many Americans gain 1 to 2 pounds during the holiday season. Those extra pounds often become permanent baggage. Year after year, those pounds can add up, and contribute to overweight or obesity later in life. No one wants to be on a strict diet during the holidays. How can you enjoy the holidays without gaining weight? With a little planning, it really is not so hard:

1) Shop Smart: Plan your menu to include plenty of fruits, vegetables, lean meats, seafood, whole grains, and low-fat dairy.

Consult the nutrition label to choose foods rich in nutrients but lower in fat, calories, and sugar. Shave calories by adding fewer nuts, and less cheese, cream sauces, gravy, butter, and whipped cream.

2) Start the Party Light: Most appetizers tend to be loaded with calories and it is so easy to over eat them before the meal.

Make it easier on yourself and your guests by offering light and satisfying appetizers. Shrimp cocktails, whole-grain crackers with reduced-fat

cheese, vegetables with a low-fat yogurt dip, or fresh fruit skewers are all great choices.

3) Harness the Power of Produce: Add more simple vegetable and fruit dishes to your menu instead of heavy dishes with sauces. Fill up on healthy fiber without lots of extra calories. For example, simple peas or corn are healthier than creamed peas or corn.

Fresh is usually the best when produce is in season. But when prices are high in winter, head to the frozen food aisle. Canned foods can also be a healthy option. Read the nutrition labels to find fruits and vegetables with less added sodium and sugar.

4) Make Simple Swaps: Create healthier versions of your holiday favorites by shaving calories wherever you can. Simple swaps of lower-fat ingredients are easy ways to save calories and no one will even notice the difference.

Use chicken stock, fat-free yogurt, light cream cheese, and low-fat milk in place of high-fat ingredients. Substitute non-fat yogurt or applesauce for oil in baked goods.

5) Serve Healthier Desserts: For dessert, try chocolate-dipped strawberries. Cut pies into smaller slices.

6) Back Away From the Eggnog: Go for lower calorie drinks like sparkling water or diet soda. Children can drink 100% fruit juice or skim milk.

7) Take Smaller Portions: It is completely fine to want to sample everything on the holiday menu, but do just that...sample! Sit down and take your time to taste and savor every bite. Resist the urge to go back for more by waiting at least 20 minutes for your brain to register that you are comfortably full. If you are still hungry, eat more vegetables and drink water.