



Feature Column

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Keeping Your Hometown Healthy

Add a Taste of Health to Your Holiday Eating

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Here come the holidays again. A time of thankfulness and good food, joyfulness and good food, socializing and good food; and, did I mention good food? Ok, so I've made my point – you're probably going to eat a lot over the holidays. It's part of what happens this time of year.

The average American gains between seven and 10 pounds over the holidays. While this is not the best time to try and lose weight, gaining weight is not inevitable. Planning and common sense can prevent the holidays from being a diet disaster. Here are some tips to help you on your way to a healthful holiday season:

- Don't deprive yourself of your favorite goodies. Moderation is the key. Eat slowly and savor those scrumptious delights. You'll get maximum enjoyment from minimum portions.
- When at a party, put a small amount of food on your plate and leave the serving area. If you stand in the vicinity of the snacks, you're more likely to indulge. Concentrate on socializing. It's more difficult to eat when you're talking.
- Evaluate your eating weekly, not by the day or the meal. This means you can splurge a little, as long as you make up for it by being diligent at other times. If you feast at a party, eat

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moderately before or after.

- Increased activity is good damage control to counteract the extra calories that are eaten. Walk the malls while you shop, take the stairs rather than the elevator or escalator and park farther from the store entrance (that shouldn't be difficult during the holidays!). Healthful activities such as skating, walking, playing games, decorating and singing carols around the neighborhood are fun ways to take the emphasis off eating.
- When hosting a party, provide healthy, low-fat alternatives. If attending one, ask if you may contribute a dish. You will know that you can comfortably indulge in at least one of the items offered.

Certain foods are synonymous with the holiday season and highly desirable, albeit calorie and fat-laden. However, ingredient substitutions and preparation methods can allow you to trim down the fat and calories. Check the Internet or your local libraries for recipes that are lighter versions of the traditional ones, or adopt some of the following suggestions, in order to "have your cake and eat it too:"

- Make pie crust from crushed graham crackers with fruit juice and bake;
- Use low-fat dairy products for recipes;
- Lower the fat in recipes by replacing one whole egg with two egg whites, or applesauce instead of oil;
- Grill, roast, bake, broil, steam or poach, rather than fry;
- For snacking, use low-fat cereal mix; serve vegetable sticks with low-fat dressing, or fruit with low-fat yogurt dip.

One way to create healthy holiday fare is to include plenty of fruits and vegetables and their

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juices. While many feel it is more difficult to eat the recommended five or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily during the winter months, it can be done:

- Drink OJ Spritzers (100 percent orange juice, seltzer water, topped with a strawberry)
- Bake spaghetti squash at 350 degrees for 30 minutes and serve with tomato sauce
- Serve colorful fruit parfaits (alternately layer granola, low-fat yogurt and fruit)
- Add cranberries or cherries to your stuffing recipe
- Add drained, canned fruit (in its own juice, not heavy syrup) into your gelatin mold.

And when thinking of a gift idea, don't forget the gift of health. Give a fruit basket decorated with seasonal items such as football pennants, pinecones or holiday ornaments. What better gift for those you love?

Have a wonderful and healthy holiday season, and begin the New Year in good health! For more information about healthy recipes, or a brochure with instructions on creating a healthy gift basket, contact the Arkansas Department of Health's 5 A Day Program at 1-800-482-5400 ext. 2627, or visit our Web site at www.healthyarkansas.com (type "5 A Day" in the search window).

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