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Simple Steps to a Thanksgiving Menu Makeover

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It may be hard to believe, but with Thanksgiving just around the corner, followed by all the parties leading up to Christmas, the holiday season is here. That means it's a good time to **start** considering how you can modify your typical holiday menu items to make them healthier.



The good news is that it doesn't have to be difficult - try a few of these easy holiday meal makeover ideas for your next big event...

Thanksgiving Meal Makeover

Salad: Be sure to eat a green salad before you start eating anything else. Ultimately, a healthy salad (with a variety of your favorite **vegetables**, and even fruits if you wish) will help fill you up so that you don't eat as much at your holiday meal. Likewise, setting out a platter of fresh vegetables or **shrimp** will help you and your guests fill up on healthy foods before the meal.

Roasted Turkey: The classic recommendation for this classic holiday food is to avoid eating skin on the turkey. As well, you can make for a healthier holiday meal by having a portion of roasted turkey that is no more than 1/4 the size of your plate (and only one helping!).

Mashed Potatoes: Instead of adding high-fat cream, whipping cream, or whole milk, use a **lower-fat alternative**. Good substitutes that maintain the full flavor of your potatoes include non-fat creamers or evaporated milk (in a can in the baking section of the supermarket). Also, using garlic and low-fat cheese helps provide mashed potatoes with some interesting flavor without adding a ton of **fat**.

Sweet Potatoes: Candied sweet potatoes are a holiday favorite. But this recipe contains a lot of **margarine or butter**, brown sugar, and marshmallows, which contribute loads of extra fat and sugar to your holiday meal. Consider revamping the recipe by cutting down on the fat, using an **artificial sweetener** like Splenda, and cutting back on the marshmallows you use. A yummy alternative is to make roasted root vegetables with apple juice. It can be made by boiling 3 cups apple juice with 3 Tbsp butter and 1 cup white wine, which is then added to a roasting pan full of a variety of root vegetables (turnips, parsnips, carrots, sweet potatoes and rutabagas). Roasted for about 40 minutes at 425 degrees F, you have a healthier dish with less fat that gives you a greater spectrum of nutrients from the variety of vegetables!

Green Bean Casserole: When making this holiday favorite, use low-fat mushroom soup instead of the usual version. A fresh, quick alternative to this classic casserole recipe is to boil green beans briefly then add them to a fry pan with a small amount of oil, sliced red onions, slivered almonds, and black pepper.

Stuffing: Make your stuffing healthier by adding extras such as celery, carrots, onions, and other vegetables you like. Doing so will help add flavor and moisture. Removing the sausage and other meats from your stuffing will help cut down on the fat of your side dish, and ultimately your meal.

Gravy: One way to better control the fat content of your gravy is to use canned gravy instead drippings from the turkey, which can be high in fat.

Pumpkin Pie: This is one of those treats that you look forward to all year - and fortunately there are ways you can enjoy this classic without overindulging on calories and fat. Consider using low-fat whip cream or avoiding it altogether, or make the pie with a graham cracker crust instead of the usual pastry.

Leftovers: It's hard to think about a holiday meal without considering the leftovers! Some would even argue that the leftovers are better than the meal itself. It's best to avoid a fridge full of leftovers - so sending guests home with a "doggie bag" is a good way to cut down on the post-holiday meal fridge cram. However, should you wish to use the leftovers yourself, don't let the stuffed fridge lead you to forget your portion control: fill your plate with a large amount of salad (or other vegetable), and small portions of both starch (sweet or mashed potatoes) and meat. This should keep you on track for healthy eating!

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