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A Healthy Way to Give Thanks this Thanksgiving

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A recent study by the National Institutes of Health shattered the urban myth that most people gain 5-10 pounds during the holiday season (Thanksgiving to New Year's Day). The good news is that holiday weight gain is actually more like one pound, but the bad news is that the weight generally isn't lost during the rest of the year.



Gain a pound a year just from holiday overindulgence, and you'll be on the fast track to larger pants -especially since most people don't stop gaining at the holiday's end. But Thanksgiving doesn't have to kick off a season of weight gain. This year, make it a healthy holiday with a few recipes featuring traditional foods with a nutritious spin.

Craving Cranberries

Many traditional Thanksgiving foods are, in their basic form, quite healthy. Take cranberries: you know them as little crushed globes suspended in jelly. But cranberries really deserve more respect, since like other [berries](#), cranberries are brimming with polyphenol [antioxidants](#) and [Vitamin C](#). In fact, cranberries rate 6th on the United States Department of Agriculture's list of 20 high-antioxidant foods.

Help cranberries take on a more prominent role during your Thanksgiving celebration by adding a couple cups of fresh cranberries to two chopped apples or pears and a half cup of brown sugar, then bake for an antioxidant-packed winter compote.

Smashing Sweet Potatoes

What's Thanksgiving without the potatoes? Mashed potatoes can be filled with fat from butter and cream, and sweet potatoes can be a guilty indulgence too, crusted over with nuts, brown sugar, or marshmallows. In a side by side comparison, sweet potatoes pack more nutrition than a regular white potato because they are loaded with beta carotene and Vitamin C, and have a [lower glycemic index](#) (and diets that are filled with high-glycemic-index foods are linked to increased risk of developing [diabetes](#)).

Offer to bring the sweet potatoes if you're going potluck, and search out a recipe that goes easy on the high-calorie additions and lets the true flavor and health of the sweet potato shine through. A little fat-free sour cream, skim milk, and salt and pepper is all you need to make your sweet potatoes shine.

Going Nuts

In recent years, you've heard the buzz about [nuts](#) being a healthy choice because they are loaded with [monounsaturated fat](#), which can help lower LDL (bad) and total cholesterol, as well as raise HDL (good) cholesterol. [Walnuts](#), in particular, are a good choice because they also contain [omega-3 fatty acids](#), which have been shown to play an important role in the prevention of heart disease. However, as you might imagine, nuts lose their healthy edge when they're mixed into pies and complemented with butter and sugar.

This year, rather than adding nuts to buttery desserts, why not feature a heart-healthy bowl of toasted nuts on the hors d'oeuvres tray?

The Bottom Line

Thanksgiving doesn't have to be synonymous with weight gain. It's easy to use traditional ingredients to create healthy dishes for Thanksgiving that are long on health, but not short on tradition.

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