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Health

Healthy Holiday Eating
By Beth Ward, Healthy Balance Monday, December 29, 2008

Between parties and buffets, cocktails and desserts, the holidays can be a veritable landfill of unhealthy food choices. However, this holiday season doesn't have to be a battle. Healthy Balance asked dietitians and nutritionists to offer tips on how to enjoy the season without putting on the pounds.

The little things can make the difference during the holiday season, Ellen Karlin said.

Karlin is a registered and licensed dietitian and nutritionist with a practice in Owings Mills.

"I recommend to my clients the day of and the day after to take a long walk," she said. "Exercise can counteract what you indulged in."

At the buffet, steer clear of fried foods and heavy sauces and try to load up on fresh fruits and vegetables or even offer to bring those items to a party," she said.

During parties, Karlin recommends holding a glass of water or club soda and talking more.

"Being more social means you'll be doing less eating," she said. A big part of watching your weight is portion control.

"If you really have your eye on that cheesecake, it's OK to have it," she said. "But have the smallest slice, just enough to satisfy your craving."

Healthy holiday eating comes down to choices, Gloria Tsang said. Tsang is the founder and editor in chief of HealthCastle.com, an online nutrition community run by a group of registered dietitians.

And there are plenty of healthy choices that can be made whether it's in preparing meals or just eating them.

Cooking tips:

The traditional holiday meal can pack up to 2,000 calories in one sitting, Tsang said.

"A person who cooks the meals is the person who is in more control," she said. "Because they decide what goes in the food."

- Mashed potatoes

With mashed potatoes, instead of using heavy cream, Tsang recommends using buttermilk. Although it sounds fattening, it has as much fat as 2 percent milk.

"It gives texture without fat," she said.

- Pies

If you make the crust, use natural fat instead of shortening in the crust.

When buying pie crusts, look at the contents since frozen crusts tend to be high in trans-fat. However, fat-free and trans-fat-free versions are available, Tsang said.

Party Tips:

If you are going to a party, Tsang's biggest piece of advice is not to go hungry.

"We go to parties to enjoy ourselves," she said. "Oftentimes, you go to a party, you always have a choice."

- Most appetizers are pastry-based and you don't want to fill up on fattening appetizers and not have room for the meal, she said.
- Be careful what you drink. Opt for soy-nog this year instead of high-fat eggnog. And mix cocktails with zero-calorie drinks such as diet cola.
- Watch portions at the buffet table.

Either/Or:

- Ham vs. turkey

"I always say go for turkey because it is a great source of protein and if you cut off the skin you can eliminate a lot of the fat," she said.

Tsang also said ham has more sodium than turkey.

- White vs. sweet potatoes

Go for the sweet potatoes, which have beta carotene and more nutrients than white potatoes.

- Red vs. white wine

Choose red wine because it has more antioxidants and increases good cholesterol, but calorie-wise, both are the same.

- Soft vs. hard cheese

If you are concerned about fat content, soft cheese has lower saturated fat, Tsang said. But hard cheese has more calcium, she said.

AROUND THE HOLIDAYS:

People focus on the food rather than experiences during the holidays, said Joni Rampolla.

Rampolla is a registered and licensed dietitian nutritionist and has a private practice, Nutrition the Right Weigh, in Westminster.

She offered the following tips to navigate the holiday party season:

- o Plan ahead.
Before you even get to an event start planning ahead by adding a few more minutes of exercise. Tighten up your eating in the days leading up to it. And plan an activity everyone can participate in rather than sitting around or standing by a buffet table.
- o Watch out for calories in disguise. The culprits tend to be cream sauces, dips, fried foods, cream cheese, pastries and processed meat.
- o Portions matter.
Choose the smallest plate available and scan the buffet before you get in line, Rampolla suggested. Choose foods that you love and skip the things you don't.
"If you just go into line and take a little of everything, you still end up with a lot," Rampolla said.
- o Think your drink.
Some alcoholic beverages have 150 to 450 calories per glass. Limit yourself to one or two drinks and drink plenty of water.
"If you just go into line and take a little of everything, you still end up with a lot." n Joni Rampolla
- o Eat mindfully.
Rampolla said to take notice of the taste, flavor and texture of food.
"Eat slowly so you notice when you feel full," she said. It takes 15-20 minutes to get a signal to the brain that you are full.
- o Focus on family, friends and fun.
"The holiday is about making lasting memories. Celebrate the true spirit of the holiday, not the food. Organize a group walk or sport, be the designated photographer. Do something other than talking around the buffet," Rampolla said.
- o Strut your stuff.
Use the holidays to be a role model for healthier living, Rampolla said. She suggests wearing flattering clothing, especially if you've had success.
"When people comment on how you look you're more likely to try to maintain it," she said.
- o Travel with inspiration.
Rampolla suggests traveling with something that will help you stay on track: a picture of you at your goal weight, music, an inspirational saying, something to keep you motivated.
- o Think of the holidays as a marathon, not a sprint.
"One slip-up won't derail your whole plan. Overall health is determined by long-term choices. Managing your weight takes planning, commitment and focus," Rampolla said.

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