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Making Healthier Holiday Choices

The holidays are often filled with time-honored traditions, including some of our favorite meals and foods. Healthy eating is important at every stage of life, including celebrations and gatherings. As we gather this year, let's think of small changes we can make to create healthier meals and activities. Here are some tips that may help. Enjoy all the food groups at your celebration. Prepare hummus with whole grain crackers for an appetizer, enjoy fresh fruit for dessert, use low-fat milk instead of heavy cream in casseroles, and add unsalted nuts or black beans to a green-leaf salad.

Make sure to select lean protein. Turkey, roast beef, or fresh ham are great choices. Trim visible fat before cooking and try baking or broiling instead of frying. Go easy on sauces and gravies!

Cheers to good health. Quench your thirst with low-calorie beverages. Serve water or unsweetened tea with fresh fruit and mint. Offer seltzer water with a splash of 100% fruit juice or a wedge of lemon. When water just won't do, enjoy the beverage of your choice, but just cut back.

Bake healthier by using recipes with unsweetened applesauce or mashed ripe bananas instead of butter or oil. Try reducing the amount of sugar listed on the recipe and use spices such as cinnamon, allspice, or nutmeg to add flavor. Try healthier dessert options like baked apples with cinnamon with a sprinkle of sugar instead of apple pie. Invite your guests to make a parfait with colorful sliced fruit and low-fat yogurt. Try a homemade trail mix with unsalted peanuts, walnuts, dried apples, pineapple, cherries, or raisins. Add whole-grain cereals to the mix, too.

Savor the flavor of seasonal fruit and vegetables. Buy fruits and vegetables that are in season for maximum flavor and at a lower cost. Canned and frozen are great options when fresh is not available.

Be the life of the party! Laugh, mingle, dance, and play games with your family and friends. Focus on fun and enjoy the company of others. Make being active a part of the holiday tradition. Go for a walk with family and friends after a holiday meal. Give gifts that encourage others to practice healthy habits too.

Get creative with leftovers by packing extras for your guests to take home. Enjoy leftovers by adding turkey to soups or salads and add extra vegetables to omelets, sandwiches, or stews. The possibilities are endless!

The holidays are also a great time to involve the entire family. Help spark your child's interest in trying new foods by including them in creating a grocery list, organizing ingredients before baking, stirring batters, and frosting and decorating cookies and cakes. This is an opportunity for your family to create lasting family memories.

And finally, the holidays are a great time to give back to others. This holiday, spend time providing food or preparing meals for those who may need a little help. Give food to a local food pantry or volunteer to serve meals at a shelter during the holiday season. If you are looking for healthy recipes to try this holiday, check out www.celebrateyourplate.org. For more tips on choosing a healthy lifestyle, check out www.myplate.gov. Happy Holidays!