

Expert Alert

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Contact:

Micah Dorfner
507-304-7178
dorfner.micah@mayo.edu

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Mayo Clinic Health System in New Prague dietitian offers healthy holiday eating tips

NEW PRAGUE, Minn. — So you've spent all year eating healthy and exercising and you want to keep that going. Or maybe you're looking to start your nutritious turnaround today. Either way, holiday gatherings and food-focused traditions pose major challenges to those who are looking to make healthy choices this time of year. Allyn Mahowald, registered dietitian at Mayo Clinic Health System in New Prague, shares some advice for keeping the holiday season healthy – and enjoyable.

“You don't have to sacrifice healthy eating habits just because of the holidays,” says Mahowald. “With a few diet-conscious tactics, you can set yourself up for healthy holiday eating success.”

Mahowald offers the following tips to keep your waistband in check during fall and winter festivities:

- **Eat a nutritious snack before you attend parties.** Choose treats such as fruit, low-fat yogurt, string cheese or a small handful of nuts. This will help you curb your appetite and make rational decisions about what to eat and what not to eat.
- **Contribute a healthy dish to the gathering.** This is the perfect way to ensure there is something healthful for you and others to eat. Raw vegetables with low-fat dip, whole-grain crackers with low fat cheese and fresh fruit are great choices.
- **Fill your plate with low-calorie items.** Make up the majority of your plate with low-calorie foods like fruits, vegetables and lean proteins. And don't indulge on just any special treat. Instead of wasting calories on foods that you can have any time of the year, pick special items that are unique to the season and special to you.
- **Be mindful of your hunger level.** Ask yourself how hungry you really are before grabbing for goodies. When indulging, focus on quality, not quantity. Eat slowly and savor every bite. Pay attention to the smell, taste and texture of each item.
- **Don't overdo holiday baking.** Limit holiday baking to just one or two favorites, and make them in small quantities. If you can't imagine holidays without a variety of treats, host a baked goods exchange so you'll have a small assortment of goodies.

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- **Pick the right drink.** Choose water or low-calorie drinks instead of eggnog, cider and other high-calorie festive drinks. Alcoholic beverages contribute empty calories and can cause you to make poor judgments with food. Drink alcohol in moderation, if at all.
- **Visit the people, not the food.** Move socializing away from the buffet or appetizer table to prevent mindless nibbling. Keep in mind what the holidays are truly about – spending time with family and friends.

“Obesity and associated health conditions are a problem in the U.S., and holiday-related caloric overloads certainly don’t help,” adds Mahowald. “Try out these tips this holiday season to help you stay on track with your health goals.”

If you are interested in speaking with a Mayo Clinic Health System dietitian about a healthy eating plan, please call 952-758-4431.

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