

# Eat, Drink & Be Healthy

## Tips for healthy holiday eating

By **BRENDA HEITHOFF**  
Health View Editor

As the holidays approach, so do the season-celebrating parties with co-workers, families and friends. If you are trying to eat healthy, these festive gatherings, which usually feature an abundance of foods high in fat and calories and low in nutrition, can pose a real challenge.

Studies show that the average American gains 1 to 2 pounds during the holiday season, and those extra pounds tend to stick around long after the parties are over. Year after year, those pounds can add up and contribute to being overweight or obese later in life.

You can enjoy the holiday season without sacrificing good eating habits, says Meghan Hansen, a registered dietitian at Hy-Vee in Carroll, by focusing on a healthy balance of food, activity and fun. She offers the following tips for preparing and serving healthier holiday foods:

— **Read food labels.** When choosing foods to use for your holiday gathering, look closely at the nutritional labels. Look for items that are low in fat, calories, cholesterol and sodium, and high in important nutrients, such as fiber, vitamins A and C, iron, and calcium. The nutritional content of similar foods can vary significantly.

— **Offer a variety of fruits and vegetables.** Whether served alone with a dip or incorporated into other dishes, fruits and vegetables are great sources of important nutrients like calcium, fiber, folate, iron, magnesium, potassium, sodium, and vitamins A and C.

— **Reduce the sugar.** In most recipes, the sugar can be reduced by 25 percent with little effect on the taste and outcome of the food. For example, if the recipe calls for 1 cup of sugar, try using 3/4 of

a cup instead.

— **Use healthy fats.** Instead of cooking with butter or margarine, use healthier fats like canola and olive oil.

— **Incorporate whole grains.** Studies have shown that eating whole grains instead of refined grains lowers the risk of many chronic diseases. When baking, substitute whole wheat flour instead of white. Adding oatmeal is another way to boost nutritional value.

— **Substitute with Greek yogurt.** Greek yogurt has gained popularity as a healthy substitute in food items that are traditionally high in fat, such as dips, dressings and desserts. For example, use 3/4 cup Greek-style yogurt in place of 1 cup oil or 1 cup of Greek yogurt in place of 1 cup mayonnaise or sour cream.

— **Serve nuts.** A mix of walnuts, almonds, pistachios, sunflower seeds and soy nuts would make an appealing, healthy appetizer for a holiday party. Nuts can help lower your cholesterol and promote heart health. Nut butters, which can be served with crackers, are another tasty option.

— **Don't forget the chocolate.** Candy is a holiday staple, but some choices are healthier than others. One to two ounces of dark chocolate that is over 70-percent cocoa is acceptable as part of a healthy daily diet, says Hansen. Studies have shown that dark chocolate is a potent antioxidant. Fun flavors, like sea salt and almond, would be a great choice for a holiday party.

— **Add seeds.** Chia and flax seeds, which are loaded with omega 3s, can be added to many recipes, such as salads, soups, pies, breads and cookies, to aid heart health. These seeds can also be used to top yogurt, oatmeal and other



Meghan Hansen, a registered dietitian at Hy-Vee in Carroll, says there are several ingredient substitutions that people can use to make their holiday meals healthier. For example, Greek-style yogurt can be used in place of sour cream or oil.

foods.

— **Involve super foods.** Nutrient-rich super foods, like pumpkins, squash, sweet potatoes, apples and cranberries, make satisfying

comfort-food meal options.

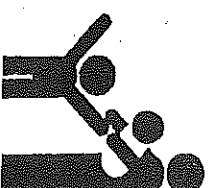
— **Cut the fat.** When purchasing ingredients, look for low-fat options. For example, most people can't tell the difference when 98 percent

fat-free cream of mushroom soup is used in a casserole instead of regular cream of mushroom soup. Another

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