



Ontario Home Economics Association

Ask a Professional Home Economist

For Immediate Release

Healthy Holiday Eating

by Deb Campbell, P.H.Ec.

Is this really possible or is it just another oxymoron? Healthy eating during the upcoming holiday season is absolutely possible and, like anything else, in order to succeed you need to do some planning. You may think you can only control your intake when you are the host, but it is very easy to make wise choices anytime. You know there are going to be some difficult occasions when food and drink are plentiful because we all want to try new recipes and flavour combinations on our guests. As a guest, you can enjoy the party and go home without having all those leftovers around to tempt you.

When you are the host, plan your menu with a variety of guests' needs in mind. The time of day for your event will have a bearing on what you serve. If it's a late afternoon or early evening affair, guests may be using it as a meal replacement. Have a couple of protein sources – meat, fish, poultry, egg or legume-based items. There will undoubtedly be someone watching their weight and they would appreciate some lower-fat and flavourful choices – small tasty morsels. Baking, broiling and microwaving are good preparation options. Always remember to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold; use heating plates and ice when necessary.

A dessert and coffee party is always fun, spending time doing more elaborate creations for your guests. You may have the reputation as a great baker and therefore will want to show that off. Also remember to have some fresh fruit cut up, possibly with a lower-fat yogurt dip, which could be done as colourful kabobs. Meringue nests (a no-fat option) for the fruit can look very festive as well.

If you are a whiz with hors d'oeuvres, a cocktail reception is a perfect choice. Try not to have everything in a pastry shell. The mixture for your savoury meat turnovers could be done as meatballs. Use lower-fat cheeses with flavourful herbs for cheese balls. Choose calorie-reduced salad dressing, yogurt and sour cream for your dip recipes. Again, by adding fresh herbs, the calories from fat won't be missed. There are some very interesting whole grain breads and crackers available to use as bases and dippers – they give a great look and are tasty, along with an array of veggies, of course.

There will be alcohol served at most events, which means calories. It could be wine or beer. There may be a punch or eggnog available. No festive season is complete without a least one glass of eggnog – but make it a very small one. There should also be carbonated or flat water available at the bar, both excellent choices after one alcoholic beverage. Add fresh citrus slices or berries to the glass to make it festive.

Distance yourself from the party buffet table. Go through once, make your selections, and then go across the room away from the table and have a pleasant time catching up with friends.

When larger dinner meals are being served, think about your whole day's intake so that you don't overload. Most will include a number of vegetable choices – indulge! Eat lighter during the day if you know it will be a late-day meal. If it is a noon meal – ask someone to join you for an afternoon walk around the neighbourhood. There may be a dessert buffet served. Look it over and choose one piece of your very favourite – the one that makes the season perfect for you.

Unless you are on a restricted intake diet being supervised by medical personnel, you can enjoy a variety of tasty morsels over the holiday season without throwing all of your healthy eating habits out the window – it's all about balance. Remember to plan ahead so that you can savour these treats without the guilt. You will also be able to make resolutions about things other than weight loss for the New Year.

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The Ontario Home Economics Association, a self-regulated body of Professional Home Economists, promotes high professional standards among its members so that they may assist families and individuals to achieve and maintain a desirable quality of life.

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