

Eat healthy while enjoying your holidays

By Lisa Lindsay

The holidays are often filled with gatherings of family and friends that feature food. Parties, big meals, snacks at the office and drinking create a challenging environment for eating healthy. Add to that days of travel with little scheduled exercise, and it can become difficult to stay on track.

You can choose healthy. For example, include physical activity during family and friend get-togethers, such as a scavenger hunt, playing an active outdoor game or taking a walk. Try parking farther away from your destination and taking the stairs.

Here are tips to help you maintain healthy eating habits during the holiday season:

- Eat a small, balanced meal or snack before you leave home. Do not skip meals or go hungry. “Saving up” can lead to overeating.
- Drink water, unsweetened coffee or tea, or other sugar-free beverages. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation and never drink on empty stomach.
- Study ALL options on the table, start by adding your favorite fruits and vegetables, then add in foods you decided are worth eating. If you taste something that you do not enjoy, leave it on your plate
- When hosting a dinner, put healthy choices on the menu such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean meats.
- Use healthier cooking methods such as baking, broiling or barbecuing foods instead of frying or adding extra fats during cooking.
- Use small dinner plates.
- When cooking, avoid sampling foods more than necessary.
- If you are the host, keep the food in the kitchen or away from the table to limit grazing. If you are the guest, offer to bring a healthy dish.
- Include more fruit dishes, such as baked apples with cinnamon and sugar instead of apple pie. Split your dessert with a family member or friend.

You can lighten up your holiday menus with healthy recipe swaps. Try some of these healthier substitutions in the gingerbread cookie recipe below.

- Replace butter with avocado, Greek yogurt or fruit purees.
- Use fruit purees, full fat yogurt or tofu to replace half of the oil in recipes.
- Replace an egg with ¼ cup of mashed banana, unsweetened applesauce, plain or vanilla yogurt, or 1 tablespoon of ground flax or chia seed mixed with 3 tablespoons of water
- Instead of sugar, use a sugar substitute such as stevia, shredded apple, applesauce or mashed banana
- Substitute wheat flour or black bean puree for white flour.

Gingerbread Cookies

¼ cup butter, softened

¼ cup 50-70% vegetable oil spread

½ cup packed brown sugar

2 teaspoons ground ginger
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
¼ cup full-flavor molasses
1 egg
2 cups all-purpose flour
¾ cup whole wheat flour

In a large bowl, combine butter and vegetable oil spread; beat with an electric mixer on medium to high speed for 30 seconds. Add brown sugar, ginger, baking soda, cinnamon, salt and cloves. Beat until well mixed, scraping side of bowl occasionally. Beat in molasses and egg. (Mixture will look curdled.) Add all-purpose flour and whole wheat flour, beating just until combined. Divide dough in half. Cover and chill the dough for 2 to 3 hours or until easy to handle.

Preheat oven to 375°F. Lightly grease cookie sheets or line with parchment paper; set aside. On a lightly floured surface, roll dough, half at a time, to 1/8-inch thickness. Using a 2- to 3-inch gingerbread person cookie cutter, cut out shapes; reroll scraps as necessary. Place cutouts 1 inch apart on prepared cookie sheets.

Bake for 4 to 6 minutes or until edges are firm and centers are set. Cool on cookie sheets on wire racks for 1 minute. Transfer to wire racks; cool.

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