

Don Colbert: Healthy Holiday Alternatives

Studies show most people gain a few pounds over the holidays. People who are already overweight tend to gain the most.

The bad news is most people keep those extra pounds for life—and it keeps adding up year after year. Here are a stocking full of ways to make the holidays healthier and the New Year less depressing.

1. Don't try to lose weight over the holidays. Maintaining your current weight may be a more practical goal. Whatever you choose to eat, eat more slowly and wait 20 minutes before deciding on a second course.

2. Make healthier casseroles. Green bean almandine with a squeeze of lemon is healthier than traditional green bean casserole. Simple peas or corn are healthier than creamed peas or corn. Use low-fat soup, increase the veggies and top it with a crunchy whole-grain cereal instead of fried onions.

3. Roasting or grilling meat, seafood, vegetables and potatoes. It's a smart, low-calorie cooking alternative that brings out the natural sweetness and flavor in foods. Roasted sweet potatoes with a sprinkle of cinnamon sugar and a spritz of butter are delicious alternative to the traditional casserole. Grilled pork chops served with a mango salsa are much healthier than pork chops smothered in mushroom cream.

4. Reduce salt by half in most recipes by substituting fresh herbs and flavored vinegars. Go easy on salty condiments, such as pickles, catsup, mustard and soy sauce. Include crunchy, raw veggies like cucumber slices, jicama sticks, carrots and celery on the relish tray. Try a new homemade dip, such as hummus and salsa.

5. When making desserts or eggnog, reduce the amount of sugar by half. Enhance “sweetness” by adding a bit of citrus, more vanilla, nutmeg or cinnamon. Try turbinado sugar, honey or molasses—their flavor means you can use less. If recipes call for sugary toppings like frosting, jams and syrup, try fresh or unsweetened frozen fruit instead. Consider chocolate-dipped strawberries. If you insist on pie, choose healthier pumpkin pie. Make it with non-fat evaporated milk, less sugar and topped with fat-free whipped cream.

6. When baking, reduce the fat by substituting unsweetened applesauce, prune puree or mashed banana. Instead of regular condensed milk, use condensed skim milk. This works with fudge as well.

7. For gravy, mix whole grain flour into cold skim milk and pour slowly into heated, fat free, low sodium broth. Stir until thickened and season to your liking.

8. Holiday beverages can add a huge number of calories. Choose low calorie choices such as sparkling water or a low-calorie punch. Alcohol releases inhibitions and can increase hunger. If you drink alcohol, choose simple beverages like wine and beer rather than high calorie, sugar filled cocktails.

9. As you plan your holiday parties, ask your guests if they have any food preferences or intolerances. Some may be lactose intolerant. Others may have cut red meat from his diet. You can’t please everyone, but you can include a wide variety of healthy foods. Keep in mind most people are more health conscious today than they were a few years ago. Be part of that crowd.

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