

Eat, Drink, and be Merry!

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I don't know about you, but eating during the holidays is a lot of fun. Typically you have meals or special foods that are only made during the holiday season. The only problem is, due to the occasions, many tend to overindulge in that special meal. One serving turns into two, or three, or four... As much as you may look forward to the holidays, many dread it because it is hard to control yourself. This article aims at giving you not only practical tips to lightening up those recipes, but also tips to help you enjoy the meal without overindulging.

You can lighten up a recipe without removing the flavor. The goal is to lighten the recipe and not try to make it sugar-free, fat-free, and taste-free all in one. There are some recipes available online that have already taken on this task. Cooking Light (www.cookinglight.com) is one fun place to look for recipes because of the enormous selection. Beware though, they do tend to use some ingredients that you will not use in any other recipe and the ingredients can be costly; be sure to review the complete ingredient list before you set your mind on a particular dish. The American Heart Association (www.americanheart.org) and the American Diabetes Association (www.diabetes.org) also have recipes available that are tailored to reducing sodium, fat, or carbohydrates.

If you're a do-it-yourself type of person, here are some ideas:

1. Decrease fat:

- a. If cooking on the stovetop and fat (oil, butter, margarine, shortening) is used to keep an item from sticking, try using a non-stick spray or non-stick pan.
- b. If baking, substitute $\frac{1}{2}$ of the fat called for with applesauce or pureed prunes.
- c. If a recipe calls for nuts or coconut, cut amount called for in half, then toast and chop it before adding to the dish.
- d. If a recipe calls for cheese, cut amount added in half.
- e. If a recipe calls for milk, use 1% or skim milk.
- f. If a recipe calls for 2 eggs, use 1 egg and 2 egg whites or $\frac{1}{2}$ cup egg substitute.
- g. If a recipe calls for heavy cream, use equal parts of half-and-half and evaporated skim milk.

2. Decrease sugar:

- a. If a recipe calls for canned fruit, use fruit packed in light-syrup or syrups sweetened with Splenda®.
- b. Use a sugar substitute.
- c. Reduce amount called for by $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$.

3. Decrease salt:
 - a. If baking an item that doesn't have yeast, reduce the amount of salt by $\frac{1}{2}$. If the recipe has yeast, don't decrease the salt because it is needed for the rising process.
 - b. If cooking, reduce by $\frac{1}{2}$ or omit completely.
 - c. If a recipe calls for garlic-salt, celery-salt, or onion-salt, use their salt-free counterparts (i.e. garlic powder, onion powder) or the actual item finely chopped.
 - d. Beware of the use of sea salt – it is still SALT! One teaspoon of sea salt has ~1700 mg sodium vs 1 teaspoon table salt (2300mg). Use herbs in place of salt.

If you're the one who does the eating but doesn't do the cooking, here are some tips to help make it through the meal:

1. Eat a small snack before you leave the house. Arriving on an empty stomach will lead to trouble.
2. Scope out the buffet table before you start loading your plate. You can then decide what is worth using your calories on and what is worth passing by.
3. Eat your calories, don't drink your calories. You can easily put away over 500 calories from drinking. Here are a few crashers:
 - a. 1 cup Eggnog = ~340 calories
 - b. 5 oz wine = ~100 calories
 - c. 12 oz beer = ~180 calories
 - d. 12 oz light beer = ~140 calories
 - e. $\frac{1}{2}$ oz distilled spirit (vodka, gin, rum, whisky) = ~100 caloriesDepending upon recipe:
 - f. 12 oz Mudslide = ~800 calories
 - g. 2 oz Martini = ~120 calories
 - h. 6 oz Margarita = ~320 calories
4. Aim for maintaining your weight, not weight loss, during the holiday season.
5. Use a smaller plate – we tend to eat with our eyes as much as we do our mouths. If it looks like you're getting a skimpy portion, you'll think you're getting a skimpy portion (when it is likely the correct serving size). Forego the large dinner plate and stick with a salad plate instead.
6. Stick to general healthy eating guidelines – choose fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean cuts of meat and portion your plate as follows: $\frac{1}{2}$ of your plate dedicated to fruits and vegetables, $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate for lean meat, and $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate for starch.

Don't become the scrooge that everyone wants to avoid. The holidays are for family gatherings, cheer, and food. Enjoy that time together, plan ahead, and eat wisely.