

... December 2011 ...

QUICK TAKES



Celebrate with Healthy Foods

Healthy lifestyle habits are often neglected at holiday time. Schedules are busier than ever. There's almost no room for exercise. Healthy eating gets put on the back burner. You're probably thinking that your holiday party is not the time to focus on health.

We beg to differ.

Holiday celebrations are about family, friends, conversation and sharing -- not about fat-filled foods and calorie-loaded drinks. When planning a party, try to remember:

- Be realistic: Your festivities don't have to be storybook perfect.
- Don't abandon healthy eating: Include lots of plant foods -- everything from bowls of fruit to veggie platters to bean salads in your menu.
- Combine fun and exercise: Add some physical activity to the party mix, whether it's ice skating or playing a favorite Wii game.

Less Hype -- More Holiday

Here are some helpful tips for healthy eating and entertaining that won't throw your checkbook -- or bathroom scale -- into a tailspin.

Set Up a Low-Cal Bar

There's no need to drink calories by the hundreds when so much delicious food is at hand. The smart host will offer a wide variety of low-calorie and no-calorie drinks so guests will have plenty of options. Here are a few to try:

- Festive holiday punch made with 1 part pomegranate juice, 2 parts diet orange soda and 3 parts pomegranate-flavored seltzer. (For a more spirited punch, add 1 part light rum and a dash or two of bitters.) Float lots of frozen orange slices in your punch. Blood oranges are an especially festive touch.
- Fresh apple cider and diet ginger ale spritzers.
- Light beer
- Wine and club soda spritzers
- Light eggnog -- just keep portions small!
- Mugs of coffee or cocoa served with a cinnamon stick
- Orange-spice tea.

Remember 'My Plate' for the Holidays

The USDA retired its Food Pyramid nutrition icon this past year and replaced it with the easier-to-understand MyPlate icon. This visual tool has been designed to help Americans make healthier food choices. The Choose MyPlate campaign suggests that half of the national dinner plate be devoted to fruits and vegetables, one quarter of the plate goes to whole grain foods and the remaining quarter is for meat or other high-protein foods.



You can expand the MyPlate concept to the buffet table. When planning your holiday party, you'll want at least half of your dishes to feature vegetables or fruits. Think big salads of colorful lettuces, fruit bowls and vegetable platters. Another quarter of the buffet real estate should showcase whole grains, from whole-wheat rolls and baked crackers to brown rice pilaf to kasha or bulgur salads. A holiday ham, roast turkey or poached salmon fillet can fill in the MyPlate protein territory. A pot of chili with more beans than meat is always a favorite.

Healthy Party Foods

Make fruits and vegetables the stars of your holiday buffet table. Here's how:

- Pile two or three dozen clementines (aka "cuties") in a bowl and make this your table centerpiece. Each easy-to-peel fruit has only 40 calories.
- Belgian endive leaves, cucumber spears and sliced red and green bell peppers make a lovely crudité's platter.
- Assemble a fruit platter with red and green grape clusters, sliced apples (Golden Delicious apples won't turn brown), pineapple spears and honeydew melon slices.
- Fresh pomegranate seeds add a cheery sparkle to a big salad of baby spinach leaves, torn radicchio, sliced fennel and almonds.
- Equal parts shredded green and red cabbage form the basis of a holiday slaw. Toss with minced red onion, dried cranberries, chopped pistachio kernels and a low-calorie slaw dressing.



Rely on fat-free and low-fat dairy products for dips and sides:

- Combine 2 cups fat-free Greek yogurt or sour cream with 1/2-cup grated cucumber. Season with chopped fresh parsley, snipped chives and a pinch of dried dill. Serve with whole-wheat pita chips.
- Blend 2 packages low-fat cream cheese with 1/2-cup chopped mango chutney and 2 tablespoons curry powder. Pat the mixture into a ball and roll in sliced almonds. Serve with lentil chips or rice crackers.
- Puree 2 roasted red peppers in a blender, then stir into 2 cups fat-free sour cream. Season with Spanish smoked paprika and a squeeze of lemon. Serve alongside roast turkey or grilled fish.

Increase the fiber -- and flavor -- in quick breads, yeast rolls, bars and cookies with white whole-wheat flour. You'll find it in most supermarkets.

- Use 2 parts white whole-wheat flour and 1 part bread flour for the flour called for in your favorite holiday yeast bread recipes.
- For quick breads, muffins and chewy cookie recipes, use equal parts white whole-wheat and all-purpose flours.

Hermit Spice Bars Makes: 3 dozen bars

Spicy, gingery hermits are an old New England favorite. The raisins and applesauce combine to make a chewy, moist bar with little fat.

Ingredients

1 cup all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
1 cup white whole-wheat flour
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
2 teaspoons ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground cloves
1 cup raisins
1/2 cup unsweetened applesauce
1/3 cup canola oil
1/2 cup packed brown sugar (light or dark)
1/2 cup light or dark molasses (not blackstrap)
2 large eggs
1/2 cup finely chopped candied ginger
2 tablespoons coarse or decorating sugar

Preparation

1. In a mixing bowl, whisk together flours, baking soda, salt and ground spices. Set aside.
2. In a food processor, process raisins and applesauce to a rough paste. Add oil, brown sugar, molasses and eggs -- process just to blend. (If you don't have a food processor, chop raisins to a paste with a large knife.) Scrape into a mixing bowl and stir in applesauce, oil, brown sugar, molasses, eggs and candied ginger. Beat to mix. Stir in flour mixture. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or for up to 24 hours.
3. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.
4. Divide the chilled dough into 4 equal pieces. Transfer one piece of dough to a lightly floured work surface. Shape it into a somewhat flattened 10-inch log. Transfer the log to a baking sheet and repeat these steps with the remaining dough pieces. Sprinkle a narrow line of coarse/decorating sugar down the length of each log.
5. Bake for 15-18 minutes until the edges are dry. The logs will still be slightly soft in the middle. Let cool on the baking sheets.
6. Cut the logs into 1-inch-wide (2.5-cm) bars. Hermits can be stored in an airtight container for a week or longer.



Nutritional info per bar

87 Calories
2 g Fat
0 g Saturated fat
1 g Protein
15 g Carbohydrate
1 g Fiber
38 mg Sodium
18 mg Calcium

Source:
Healthy Living Kitchens