



Healthy Holiday News

Naughty and Nice Holiday Foods

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Gorging on favorite holiday foods can widen your waistline, but they don't have to spell dietary disaster. In fact, some of your guiltiest pleasures may be good for you.

Putting Holiday Weight Gain in Perspective

At this time of year, you can hardly escape hearing that Americans gain about 5 pounds from the constant celebrating.

True, some people probably pack on that much, or more, with holiday foods. For the rest of us, the weight increase is actually a lot less, however.

That's the conclusion from a *New England Journal of Medicine* study, which found most people gained about a pound between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day.

But that's no reason to eat with wild abandon during the holidays.

"Putting on a pound or so every year makes a big difference when you never get around to losing it," says Pat Vasconcellos, RD, a Massachusetts-based spokeswoman for The American Dietetic Association.

In a decade's time, the effects of nibbling a few cookies here and there may easily add 10 pounds to your frame.

"The trick is to minimize the damage from holiday foods and have fun at the same time," says Janice Bissex, MS, RD, co-author of *The Moms' Guide to Meal Makeovers*.

Tips to Avoid Holiday Weight Gain

Eating regular meals and snacks every day makes it easier to resist overdoing it at festive events. When you occasionally skimp on meals because you're busy shopping, wrapping, and baking, nosh on a protein-packed snack, such as low-fat yogurt or reduced-fat cheese, to blunt your hunger before gathering with family or friends.

At parties, pile your plate with lower-fat foods to limit high-calorie splurges. The



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following top picks have fewer calories, fat, and sodium and more fiber than other holiday fare:

- Whole grains, such as whole-wheat rolls, wild rice, and quinoa
- Shrimp, lobster, and other steamed seafood
- Plain or lightly dressed vegetables
- Meat and poultry without the gravy
- Salad greens (lightly dressed)
- Fresh fruit

'Good for You' Holiday Foods

You know that lower-fat foods are the wisest choices no matter what time of year. But the benefits of holiday fare don't end with fruit, vegetables, and whole grains.

"Many holiday foods that people think they should avoid are actually healthy in small amounts," says Vasconcellos.

As long as you mind your portions, these perennial favorites are wise choices. For fewer calories, prepare them with an artificial sweetener used in cooking, such as Splenda. Here's what they have to offer, besides calories:

Applesauce and Apples

Heart-healthy fiber does indeed keep the doctor away. Look for unsweetened applesauce to get the fiber without the sugar. Bake apples with the skin to get a potent flavonoid called quercetin, which helps prevent heart disease.

Cheese

You get the most bone-building calcium and protein from hard cheeses.

Cranberry Sauce (Unsweetened)

Cranberries spell trouble for bacteria that cause most urinary tract infections. If you like sweet cranberries, add a minimal amount of sugar, or artificial sweetener.

Dark Chocolate

Seventy percent dark chocolate contains the most flavonols -- helpful plant substances that help decrease cholesterol

Green Beans

Naturally low in calories, string beans are loaded with vitamin K, which helps protect your bones. Also, a good source of vitamin C and vitamin A. But skip heavy sauces with this veggie. Try beans lightly tossed with olive oil and lemon.



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Nuts

Nuts are chock-full of heart-healthy unsaturated fat, vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients.

Pumpkin Pie

This rich orange vegetable contains carotenoids for making vitamin A in the body and fighting free radicals. Pumpkin is also a good source of potassium and fiber. Beware: most pies are loaded with sugar. Use artificial sweetener instead of sugar for a lower calorie dessert.

Yams/Sweet Potatoes

Yams offer carotenoids, potassium, vitamin C, and fiber. Candied yams are high in sugar. Bake with a bit of brown sugar, or with artificial sweetener, for the taste without the calories.

Don't Let Holiday Foods Get the Best of You

Curb calories from so-called naughty foods by taking tiny portions. The first few bites of any food provide the most pleasure. Once you've finished your treat, fight the urge for more.

- Sit far from buffet tables, candy dishes, and cookie-laden platters.
- Excuse yourself from the dinner table when done eating.
- Keep your mouth busy by talking with friends and family.
- Chew gum or suck on a sugarless breath mint to prevent picking.
- If you're able, brush your teeth; the taste of toothpaste dulls taste buds

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