



Holiday Eating Tips from Alton Memorial

November 19 2020 12:47 PM

ALTON, IL – The New Year is when we start making resolutions to lose weight. The main reason we need to do that is because we ate too much over the holidays.

Stepping on the scale the first week of January doesn't necessarily need to be a dreadful experience. Karen Arensmann, a registered dietitian at Alton Memorial Hospital, has a few tips to make sure we're maintaining a healthy diet amidst all the holiday festivities.

“And with COVID-19 this year, stress eating has become more of a problem,” Karen said. “But maybe with, or instead of, the stress eating, some stress walking is a great idea. Keeping yourself moving is extremely helpful, along with eating sensibly.”

Perhaps the number of large get-togethers will be reduced this year because of the pandemic, but all the holiday food is still going to be there. Arensmann says that if you are hosting a dinner, make sure the menu includes healthy food choices such as fruits, vegetables and lean meats.

“Uncooked vegetables, and fruit, should always be a part of the meal,” she said. “Stay away from the dips if you can. Those just add a lot of unnecessary extra calories.”

Above all, Arensmann said that eating shouldn't be the focus.

“At the holidays, we should be thinking about the simple things,” she said. “And the best part of the holidays is being together with family and friends, at least as much as we should be safely this year with the pandemic in mind. Our holiday times should not be first and foremost about the food.”

A few other tips to keep in mind:

- Don't skip meals leading up to a big event. That can lead to unwise decisions at the buffet table. Baking, broiling and barbequing are good methods for cooking meats such as turkey. Avoid frying or adding extra fat during cooking.
- When you're cooking, avoid sampling the foods more than necessary. These calories add up.
- If you're the host of the dinner, clear the table and put unused food away to help guests avoid grazing.
- If you're the guest at someone else's house, offer to bring along a healthy dish that you know you will enjoy and can substitute for a not so healthy option.
- Eat a small, balanced meal or snack before you leave home. If you arrive to the party hungry, you'll be more likely to overindulge (another great reason to NOT skip breakfast and lunch).
- Study ALL of the food options, and think about what you are going to have before you put anything on your plate. Decide which foods are worth eating and which can be ignored, and then stick to that decision. Make only one trip through the buffet line.
- If you taste something that you don't enjoy, leave it on your plate—don't finish it!
- Choose vegetables first. Broccoli, baby carrots, cauliflower and tomatoes are good choices that are usually on the appetizer table. Take only a small spoonful of dip or skip it entirely.
- Eat chips and crackers in moderation, and definitely avoid eating them straight from the bag. Put some on a small plate and don't load them down with creamy mayo-based dips.
- Try not to hang out near the food to avoid grazing. Find a comfortable spot across the room and focus on socializing instead of eating.
- Remember to regularly check your blood sugar throughout the holidays and adding a few extra checks on a party day may help guide your choices.
- Sip a large glass of water or mineral water. This will keep you hydrated and provide you with a better option than alcohol. Add a lemon slice for a refreshing alternative to alcohol.
- Switch hands. This surprisingly effective trick works well when the menu is mostly finger foods. Holding your beverage in your dominant hand forces you to focus more clearly on your food choices.
- Take your time. Chew slowly and savor the flavors. You will eat less and enjoy it more.
- Keep something on your plate. An empty plate tells the host you are hungry for more. Leaving a few bites signals you've had all you can possibly eat.
- Take a walk or attend your usual exercise session the day of a party. Make it a priority rather than saying there isn't time. Staying committed to your exercise routine helps lower blood pressure, raises your energy level and helps you maintain a healthy weight.