

Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge!

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Happy, Healthy Holidays!

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The sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of the holidays are here – Christmas lights twinkling, a warm fire crackling, choirs singing noel, and the sweet aroma of pumpkin pie wafting from the kitchen. The holidays are filled with activities and traditions that make it a special time of year. Sharing meals and enjoying time with family and friends nurture the soul and make the holidays come to life.



Preparing traditional dishes and enjoying meals with loved ones is often the main event of get-togethers. While our favorite seasonal foods should deliver the flavors and aromas we know and love, they should also nourish our bodies and contribute to good health to carry us into another new year. Eating foods that make us feel good both during and after the holidays makes them even more enjoyable.

Finding a balance between sticking to a healthy meal pattern and indulging in rich, decadent foods can be hard during the holiday season.

However, it may seem surprising that the “great divide” between healthy and delicious eating is hardly a reality. In fact, there are many ways to stay fit and healthy through the holidays, while enjoying the foods you look forward to in moderation. Try some of the helpful tips given here to learn how.

One of the easiest ways to help stay fit and healthy is no different from ways used the rest of the year – be physically active. While the holiday season can be busy, physical activity can easily be built into your festivities. Remember that heavy housecleaning before guests arrive, brisk walking through the store for last minute gifts, and dancing at a Christmas party can all count toward daily physical activity. Being active helps to prevent weight gain and helps manage many chronic diseases.

In terms of the food we eat, remember that healthy meal patterns are measured over time. What we eat at one meal or in one day is not what makes or breaks us. Rather, it is what

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we eat over time as part of our daily habits that counts toward our health. For example, having a slice of pumpkin pie or a cloud of creamy mashed potatoes at Christmas dinner shouldn't cause us anxiety about our health in most cases. At the same time, however, there are things we can do to avoid overindulging or eating rich, fattening foods in excess that could lead to unhealthy weight gain over the holiday season.

At holiday feasts, try to be aware of portion sizes. A small helping of rich dishes, such as creamy green bean casserole, encourages us to savor every bite. Also, be a picky eater – having stale fruit cake that you've never really liked is hardly worth the calories. Choose instead small portions of your must-have favorites. Try to eat nutritious, lower-calorie meals and snacks at other times of the day so you don't feel famished and prone to overindulging at a large meal.

Whether you or someone else is hosting a holiday gathering, try taking the lead to prepare healthy foods. Many recipes can tolerate simple substitutions to lower fat, sugar, and salt, without affecting important qualities, such as taste and texture.

Before you prepare your favorite recipes for friends and family, test them using some healthier substitutions. The recipe given below illustrates how to make a classic holiday dessert healthier. Sweet potato and fat-free evaporated milk add a healthful spin to this delicious custard. Sugar is also used in moderation, with cinnamon boosting the sweet flavor.



Sweet Potato Custard (Serves 6)

Adapted from: NHLBI's Keep the Beat Heart Healthy Recipes, 2003

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ c. sweet potato, cooked, mashed
- 1 c. evaporated skim milk
- 3 Tbsp brown sugar, packed
- 2 egg yolks (or ½ c. egg substitute), beaten
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ c. raisins
- 1 Tbsp sugar (or artificial sweetener)
- 1 ¼ tsp cinnamon, divided
- ½ tsp vanilla (optional)

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 325°F. In medium bowl, stir together sweet potato and milk, blending well.
2. Add brown sugar, egg yolks, salt, ½ tsp cinnamon, and vanilla, mixing well.
3. Spray 1-quart casserole dish with cooking spray. Pour in sweet potato mixture.
4. Combine raisins, sugar, and remaining cinnamon; sprinkle on top of sweet potato mixture.
5. Place in oven and bake for 40-45 minutes, or until a knife inserted in the center comes out clean.