

9 ways to have a nutritious holiday



Navigate the celebrations a little more healthily with these eating and food tips.

by Elizabeth Yarnell, ND, CLT

Celebrations often revolve around food—making it, eating it and sharing it with others. But this tradition can wreak havoc with even the best-laid plans to improve or safeguard our health. This simple guide can help you find healthy and delicious foods during the holidays and throughout the year.

Start with the crudités. Give yourself a goal of eating eight to 12 carrot sticks, zucchini rounds or slices of bell pepper before allowing yourself to eat other foods. The roughage from the vegetables will help fill you up and is an added bonus for those of us who experience bowel issues as part of our multiple sclerosis.

Candied nuts for the holidays

See our recipe for [candied nuts](#).

Plan ahead. If you know you'll be attending a party with trays full of tempting sweets, eat a piece of fruit or some nuts beforehand. Not feeling starving when you walk in will help you avoid mindless "grazing" at the holiday buffet.

Homemade vs. processed. Should you eat that store-bought doughnut or that piece of

homemade fudge? Store-bought pastries often contain trans fats, food dyes and artificial flavorings. Try making homemade fudge using heart-healthy coconut milk or evaporated skim milk in place of traditional evaporated milk or sweetened condensed milk. Add maple syrup for a richer taste (and a better nutrient profile) than sugar.

Snack on nuts. Nuts have high-quality protein and essential fatty acids, making them a welcome—and healthy—addition to a holiday table. Put together a festive mix of shelled hazelnuts (filberts), walnuts and dried cranberries. The sweet/tart taste of the cranberries complements the nuts, making this a delicious snack food. Another idea is to fill a bowl with shell-on nuts, such as almonds, walnuts, pecans, hazelnuts and Brazil nuts. Set a nutcracker next to the bowl and watch your family and friends go to work. Cracking nuts can be an entertaining pastime and slows you down so you don't eat too much.

Go for the fish. When you survey the food options at a gathering, ask yourself: Is there cured salmon to eat with crackers? A smoked fish spread? Tuna salad? Fish supplies us with essential fatty acids, making it one of the best brain foods around.

Follow a policy. Adopt a “wheat-free-at-parties” policy. This will keep you from filling up on rolls or pastries, but still allow you to eat wheat at normal mealtimes. It's a skip-the-bun-but-eat-the-fillings strategy and can be enormously effective when trying to avoid gaining weight.

Contribute to the spread. If you bring a dish, you can be assured of having something festive, delicious and healthy to eat. I'm a fan of what Elaine on “Seinfeld” used to call “The Big Salad.” Make it easy by starting with a bag of prewashed kale, then adding grape tomatoes, diced avocado, shelled sunflower seeds, dried cranberries and a can of drained and rinsed chickpeas (garbanzo beans). Toss together with enough of your favorite salad dressing to moisten.

Choose well. Life is all about choices. Choose to skip the eggnog, and drink spiced cider instead. While you're at it, choose apple pie over pecan pie (even though pecans contain healthy fats, the butter used in the filling doesn't), banana bread in place of cheesecake, and pesto or hummus over a creamy dip. Stay away from sugary sweets or calorie-laden foods heavy in cheese, cream or mayonnaise. For snacks you simply can't resist, limit yourself to a child-size serving.

Drink water. Drink a glass of water between alcoholic drinks. Not only will you cut out calories, but you'll stay hydrated and likely avoid a hangover as well.

Don't forget to relax and enjoy yourself! While too much fun in the way of sugar, fats and processed foods is not good for anyone, completely abstaining during group festivities can put a damper on good cheer. The holidays can be a valuable time to “break bread” with loved ones, so even if you don't eat the bread itself, make sure to savor sharing something delicious together.

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