

>> PARTY TIME

Deirdre Gamill Hock from Fitwell Lifestyles clues us in on how to survive holiday parties.



Whether you're ready or not, it's holiday time. Between holiday parties and family get-togethers, have you wondered how to have a good time yet make it to the new year without gaining weight and losing fitness? Healthy, tasty eating this time of year is really a matter of planning and balance. You don't have to give up those special holiday treats but remember to balance these high calorie favorites with some low calorie options.

Eating Healthy Isn't Impossible

Before an event, eat your normal, healthy diet but with slightly downsized portions. For instance, have a smaller bowl of cereal, leave a slice of bread off of your lunch sandwich and only eat half of your snacks. Is it a potluck? Bring raw vegetables, fruit or a low-calorie, healthy dish. You'll be surprised how many people appreciate having healthier choices. Since hunger leads to overeating, eat a small balanced snack before going to a party. Some good choices include yogurt with fruit, soup or a low fat sandwich.

Conquer the Buffet

When you are at a buffet, start by checking out the food table and deciding which items you really want to eat and in what portions. Enjoy the once a year favorites in small portions since skipping them can leave you frustrated and feeling deprived. Load up on fiber-filled vegetables and fruit to help you feel full and if you enjoy dip, take just enough to "dip." Boiled shrimp and crab are good low calorie choices when topped with a little lemon or cocktail sauce.

OPR

Keep in mind that you don't have to eat large portions of everything. In fact, you don't even have to eat everything offered. Follow the one plate rule (OPR). Once you have filled your plate, leave the food table and the room if possible. Don't go back for seconds or even nibbles.

Did you come to the party for the food or to socialize?

It's hard to talk and eat at the same time, so keep busy with conversation. Take your time between

courses and even bites to talk with old and new friends. Talking will not only slow your eating, but will also help you recognize when you're full.

The challenge of alcohol

The party atmosphere can challenge the healthiest of eating habits. Don't throw away your good intentions by consuming alcohol. The empty calories in the drink are not the only problem since drinking also makes it easier to let yourself disregard your healthy eating plans and strategies.

Party Host

Are you throwing the party or preparing the meal? Holiday meals can be healthier and remain traditional by just making a few substitutions. The best part is that your guests won't know the difference. All you have to do is substitute high fat or calorie dense items with ones that are lower in fat or calories.

Substitutes

Many cookbooks and internet sites offer suggestions for healthier versions of your favorite foods. Some common substitutions include:

- **Evaporated skim milk** in place of cream. You can whip it then use it in sauces, casseroles, and even the pumpkin pie.
- **Applesauce** for half the oil in baked goods. Try it in muffins, breads, cakes, and cookies.
- **Low-salt chicken broth** instead of milk and butter makes creamy and tasty mashed potatoes.
- Use **low-fat or fat-free** options when preparing traditional recipes.
- **Fruit juice** is a good base for salad dressing or marinade.
- **Cocoa powder** works as well as unsweetened chocolate in brownies, cakes and fudge. Use three tablespoons of cocoa powder for every ounce of unsweetened chocolate.

Traditional holiday meals can also be healthier by filling your plate with more of the right stuff and limiting portion sizes of the high-cal foods. Fill up on plenty of salad before you eat other foods, then fill your plate with vegetables and mashed potatoes but go easy on stuffing and gravy. Choose leaner cuts of poultry and meat and remove any skin or fat.

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