

Heart Healthy Holidays

There is an ongoing battle that occurs during the holidays: do you indulge in your favorite rich and high calorie foods, or do you follow your diet and deprive yourself of the foods you love most? It is important to stick to your diet year round, but during the holidays it can become especially difficult with holiday parties, potlucks, and celebrations. It is recommended that people with heart conditions such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure and heart disease follow a heart healthy diet to help prevent or improve these conditions. Following this diet does not mean that you have to avoid holiday parties or skip your favorite foods. By choosing the right amount and types of fats, increasing fiber, reducing sodium, and adding physical activity to your daily routine, you can stick to your diet and still enjoy the holiday season.

1. Amount and Type of Fat

It is hard to cut back on fat during the holidays, with the cookies, pies, and other baked goods calling out our names and tempting us. Although we need fat in our diet, paying attention to the amount and the type of fat you eat can keep you healthy over the holidays. Thirty percent of the calories that you eat should come from fat. For example, if you are following a 2,000 calorie diet, the correct amount of fat is 66 grams per day. A dietitian can give you the right amount of fat needed daily in your diet to stay heart healthy over the holidays and all year round. It is also important for heart health that you are choosing the right kinds of fat. The two types of fats are detailed below so that you can make the best choice.

Bad Fats

The fats that we refer to as the “bad” fats are saturated and trans fat. Both fats can contribute to heart disease. We should be limiting these fats in our diets. Most saturated fats come from animal sources and are usually solid at room temperature. Examples of foods that are high in saturated fats are fatty meats, bacon, sausage, butter, whole milk and poultry skin. Trans fats are created through a process called hydrogenation, which makes liquid fats more solid. Some foods that have trans fat in them are shortening, some fried foods and stick

margarine. For the holidays, you want to pay attention to store bought bakery items, which also tend to be high in trans fat. No amount of trans fat is recommended in your diet. When cooking and baking over this holiday season, try to avoid trans fats. Use the “good” fats in place or instead of saturated and trans fat.

Good Fats

The types of fat that we want to choose are the “good” fats, which are the unsaturated fats. There are two different types of unsaturated fats: monounsaturated and polyunsaturated. These fats are liquid at room temperature and come from vegetables. A few examples of these healthy fats are canola, olive, and corn oil. Nuts and seeds are also a good source of healthy fat. Adding nuts and seeds in baking or serving them as an appetizer are good ways to include these healthy fats into your holiday meal.

Quick Tip:

To reduce the fat in holiday cookies use $\frac{1}{2}$ the butter or oil the recipe calls for, and add $\frac{1}{2}$ that amount of pureed fruit such as prunes or applesauce.

2. Increase Fiber Intake

Fiber is easily overlooked during the holidays. Increasing the amount of fiber we eat each day has many benefits. The goal is to consume 20 to 30 grams of dietary fiber each day. Fiber helps us stay full so we do not feel hungry, which can help to avoid snacking on high fat holiday foods. Fiber also can help to lower our cholesterol levels and help with constipation. It is important to increase your fluid intake as you increase your fiber. Some easy ways to include more fiber in your holiday menu is to include whole grain rolls, more vegetable side dishes, cranberry sauce made with the whole berry or for dessert make baked apples (with the skin on). Choosing fruits, vegetables, and whole grains more often can help to ensure you are following a heart healthy diet.

Quick Tip:

When baking, use ½ all purpose flour, and ½ whole wheat flour to increase fiber.

3. Reduce Sodium Intake

Sodium may be a problem during the holidays with all the salt that is added to food while cooking, along with the prepackaged foods such as stuffing, gravy, and canned vegetables. Sodium is a mineral that is found in the foods that we eat, with most sodium coming from the salt that we add while cooking or at the table. A diet high in sodium can increase your blood pressure, causing stress on your heart. The current recommendation for sodium intake is no more than 1500-2000 mg per day. One teaspoon of salt is equal to 2,400 mg of sodium. In order to follow the sodium recommendation, we would have to eliminate salt in cooking and at the table. See Quick Tip below. It is best to choose fresh or frozen foods, without sauces and gravies whenever possible. Canned and processed foods tend to be very high in sodium and should be avoided. For example, the typical green bean casserole, made with canned green beans and condensed soup has about 550 mg of sodium! If you use fresh or frozen green beans with a low sodium cream of mushroom soup, the sodium will only be 215mg. Condiments can also be a hidden source of sodium. Be selective and choose condiments that are low sodium products. Products that are low in sodium have less than 300mg of sodium per serving. You can refer to the food label for the amount of sodium per serving.

Quick Tip:

Use fresh herbs and spices on your food while cooking or try salt free seasonings such as Mrs. Dash®, Perfect Pinch® Salt Free, or dried herbs.

3. Physical Activity

The American Heart Association recommends at least 30 minutes of exercise, 5 days per week. This can be difficult during the holidays with busy schedules and cold weather. Physical activity has been shown to help lower blood pressure, improve blood cholesterol levels, and keep weight under control, along with releasing tension and managing stress levels, which can easily build up over the holiday season.

Quick Tip:

To squeeze in some extra activity, take an extra lap or two around the mall while holiday shopping, or shovel your walk, and maybe your neighbor's too!

So with the holidays being a time of eating in excess and making excuses to not stick your diet, remember these simple tips to help you get through this holiday season. With the right type of fat, high fiber foods, and low sodium or sodium free choices you can survive the holiday season without adding any stress to your heart or inches to your waistline. And remember to include physical activity and enjoy the season.

Ginger CookiesIngredients

- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup unsweetened applesauce
- ¼ cup acceptable stick margarine*
- ¼ cup egg substitute OR two egg whites
- ¼ cup molasses
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- 1 teaspoon bake soda
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- Vegetable oil spray

Directions

- In a large bowl, beat the sugar, applesauce, and margarine with a sturdy spoon.
- Beat in the egg substitute and molasses.
- In another large bowl, sift together the remaining ingredients except the vegetable oil spray. Stir into the margarine mixture. Cover and refrigerate the dough for 2 hours, or until thoroughly chilled.
- Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Lightly spray baking sheets with vegetable oil spray.
- Using a teaspoon, drop about 60 mounds of dough about 1 inch apart on the baking sheets.
- Bake for 10 to 12 minutes.

*Acceptable stick margarine: lists liquid vegetable oil as the first ingredient. It should contain no more than 2 grams of saturated fat per tablespoon.

Source: The New American Heart Association Cookbook, 7th edition.

Need a Dietitian?

Registered Dietitians are here to help you with your nutrition questions. To make an appointment call 412.692.4497 (Oakland location) or 412.623.2421 (Shadyside location).