Heart Healthy Holidays

The holidays might feel like time off from the regular routine, but your heart just keeps pumping. This year give your heart the gift of heart health. Start with eating regularly and being active every day.

- Try smaller increments of activity throughout the day in order to better fit exercise into the hectic holiday season. Make being together active.
- With parties, shopping and other holiday activities, eating regularly takes planning. Make a list. Shop and stock your refrigerator and pantry with foods you need for breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks.
- Focus on fiber. This means plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and legumes. Particularly good are choices with soluble fiber like oatmeal, beans, lentils, dried peas, apples and blueberries. These foods along with flax or chia seeds can help lower cholesterol.
- Fiber and protein help your feel full between meals and make you less likely to snack. Preventing hunger pangs is the first step in making a conscious choice whether to eat holiday treat or not.
- Choosing plant-based proteins such as legumes and beans come with protein and fiber. Choosing lean poultry (white meat without skin), the tenderloin cut of pork, and fish will help minimize the saturated fat, and fatty fish like salmon, sardines and tuna are good sources of omega 3 fatty acids.
- Eating at home gives you the most control over what you eat at parties. However, you don’t have to miss a beat eating at a party, just scout it out. Make an eating plan around the healthiest options. Socialize away from the buffet to eliminate mindless eating.
- Opt for lower carb, lower calorie beverages. Of course, water is zero calories, but flavored and non-flavored seltzers, are festive alternatives and make hydrating non-calorie mixers. Alternate hydrating beverages with alcoholic beverages.
- Keep potions small. This time of year, there will always be more.

Reframing Holiday Traditions

Holiday foods are often high in sodium, sugary, and high in fat—especially saturated fat. But we make, serve, and eat them because they are filled with memories and emotional attachment that make them a cornerstone of our holiday experience. That’s okay. But don’t let traditions derail your heart health.

- Decide in advance how much of a portion will satisfy your holiday connection.
- Eliminate less meaningful foods--like cheese and crackers, to help reduce the meal’s overall saturated fat, sugar and sodium.
- Stop eating when your appreciation lessens. Usually by the fourth and fifth bite the deliciousness is not as good as the first.
- Create a new tradition by introducing a new heart healthy dish each year. Chances are, others will appreciate heart healthy options.
- Keep food put away unless it is a mealtime. Only put out enough for reasonable portions.
Kitchen Tips for Heart Healthy Holidays

Dress up salads and sides with clementine sections, pomegranate seeds, crushed nuts, citrus zest, fresh chopped herbs, fresh grated nutmeg, cinnamon sticks, toasted anis seed, drizzles of balsamic vinegar, or toasted oatmeal granola. Contrast textures with lacy frisee, delicate pea shoots and sprouts, soft cooked balls of winter squash, chewy colorful dried fruit, coarse grated carrot, bite-size florets of broccoli or cauliflower, and melt-in-your-mouth figs or tender beans. Charm the palate with miniature pears, apples, patty pan squash and turnips. Use fruit purees, specialty vinegars, mustard, and yogurt to create special drizzles for salads, vegetables, and fruits. Poach and bake fruit. Garnish with high fat, sugary, or sodium laden elements. Use whole grain flours, nut flours, and grains like oatmeal in baking by substituting up to half the white flour.

Apple, pumpkin and other fruit butters can replace fat chewy cookies and bars. Cut back on sugar by adding dried fruit for sweetness. Spice ground lean turkey to taste like sausage with thyme, rosemary, sage, fennel, and red pepper flakes. Blended raw cashews can create creamy sauces with less saturated fat. Replace the saltshaker with fresh chopped parsley, lemon zest and minced garlic, or chervil, tarragon, chives and parsley or another herb combination. Aromatics like onion, celery, carrots, parsnips, garlic, herbs, ginger, and pepper create flavor to lessen salt. Combine or substitute mashed potatoes with mashed cauliflower, celery root, and parsnips using flavorful broth to make smooth. Drink non-caloric beverages, especially if using as a mixer with wine or a spirit.

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Potato-Carrot-Kale Latkes with Lemon Apricot Yogurt

Serves: 6, makes approximately 18-20 latkes
Prep time: 15 minutes
Total time: 30 minutes

Not sure about kale? Try 3 cups of fresh cups spinach in place of the kale.

Latkes
- 1 large baking potato, peeled (optional) and quartered lengthwise
- 2 large carrots, peeled (optional)
- 3-4 large leaves kale, stems removed, well chopped
- 1/2 onion, peeled and quartered
- 1 egg
- 1/4 cup flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- Canola oil or avocado oil for frying

Using a coarse grating disk in the food processor, grate the potato, and onion; hand chop any large pieces. Transfer the mixture to a clean dish towel and squeeze out any excess liquid, then put into a large bowl. Process the carrots; hand chopping any large pieces. Add the carrots and the kale. Using a fork, stir in the egg. In a small bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, salt and pepper. Add the dry ingredients to the potato mixture and mix well.

In a large non-stick skillet, heat 1-2 tablespoons oil over medium-high heat until hot. Drop 2-tablespoon scoops of the mixture into the pan. Using the back of a spoon, flatten each dollop. Cook the first side for about 5 minutes or until golden on the edges. Turn and brown the other side, approximately 5 minutes more. Adjust the heat as needed. Drain on paper towels. Repeat for each batch.

Lemon Apricot Yogurt
- 1/2 cup dried apricots, soft
- 1 lemon, zested
- 1 cup plain nonfat Greek yogurt
- ½ teaspoon honey
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- pinch cayenne
- 2 tablespoons cilantro, chopped

Zest half a lemon and set zest aside. Remove remaining peel, pith and seeds from the lemon half. Into a small food processor blend the yogurt, lemon half, apricots, honey, cumin and cayenne. Stir in zest and cilantro. Salt to taste.

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