



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/healthy-holiday-meals>

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Make a plan for the ‘season of eating,’ says K-State nutritionist

Tips for eating before, during and after the holidays

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – The season of eating has begun.

“It seems like starting with Halloween candy, many of us can over-indulge on what we eat all the way through New Year’s day,” said Sara Sawyer, a nutrition, health and wellness agent with K-State Research and Extension’s office in Sedgwick County.

Similar to athletes entering a sports season, Sawyer encourages Americans to prepare themselves for the holiday eating season.

“Really, the holidays we celebrate are just 3, 4 or 5 days, right?” she said. “And so, what we need to focus on is not over-indulging every single day.”

“It really is easy to over-indulge throughout this period of time and think that you will worry about it after the new year. But it is important that we are being aware of what and how much we’re eating. If we feel like we’ve over-indulged, that’s fine, but then it’s important to get back to your traditional habits the next day. It’s going to be better for your heart and energy levels overall; you’ll just feel better.”

When it comes to Thanksgiving or other holiday meals, Sawyer said one healthy strategy is to think about which recipes are important to you and your family.

“And then let the rest of the foods go and provide some fruits and vegetables and an opportunity for a walk after the meal -- not only for you, but for your entire family,” she said.

More suggestions from Sawyer include:

- Add fruits and vegetables to your plate. Nutrient-rich foods help your body stay fueled with the vitamins and minerals it needs, which can reduce the temptation to overeat.

- Make time for physical activity most days of the week to help relieve holiday stress, improve sleep, and for overall health.

When it's time to make dinner, one temptation, Sawyer said, is to think we have to make all the holiday foods that we grew up with as a child, but she quips: "I'm giving you permission; You don't have to do that."

Additional tips for healthy meals before, during and after the holidays include:

- Use low-salt versions of ingredients. For example, a popular comfort food during colder months is chili. Sawyer suggests choosing low-salt beans and tomatoes, and creating a homemade seasoning versus a packet purchased at the store. Use herbs and spices to reduce salt content in such foods as meatloaf and casseroles.
- Use foods that are in-season. For example, if making chicken noodle soup, substitute spaghetti squash for the noodles – which increases fiber and reduces carbohydrates. After Thanksgiving, substitute turkey for chicken.
- Consider ingredient substitutions, such as apple sauce for butter, shortening or oil. Or use a lesser amount of butter, shortening, oil or sugar, if possible. For recipes that require eggs, Sawyer said you can substitute two egg whites for each egg in the recipe. [A listing of common ingredient substitutions](#) is available in an online publication from K-State Research and Extension.
- Eat regular meals before the party. The temptation is to think that you should starve yourself during the day so that you can indulge later on. That's not a healthy attitude, according to Sawyer. "What tends to happen is that you over-indulge to the point of eating so much that you don't feel very good afterwards," she said.
- Desserts? You bet. Consider a healthier version of the dessert, but in any case, limit yourself to one piece – rather than two or three or more.

Sawyer recommends the online publication, [Healthy Food Options for Fall and Winter Gatherings](#), available online.

More ideas on healthy living are [available online from K-State Research and Extension](#), or at [local extension offices in Kansas](#).

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story

Ingredient Substitutions, https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/ingredient-substitutions_L730.pdf

Healthy Food Options for Fall and Winter Gatherings, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/humannutrition/nutrition-topics/easytasty-documents/K-StateHealthyOptionsFallWinterGatherings.pdf>

Health and Wellness (K-State Research and Extension), <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/program-areas/health-and-wellness>

K-State Research and Extension statewide offices, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations>

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Story by

Pat Melgares

melgares@ksu.edu

For more information

Sara Sawyer

316-660-0118

sarasawer@ksu.edu