

Making Your Holiday Meals Healthier

Holiday meals can be made healthier, without any significant difference in taste, by using some basic recipe substitutions or alterations. You can reduce the sugar, fat, or sodium content of many of your favorite recipes without noticing the difference. For example, if a recipe calls for one cup of sugar, try using three-fourths or two-thirds a cup. If a recipe calls for a cup of oil or some other fat, try using three-fourths or half instead.

You can also reduce fat by choosing non-fat dairy products such as yogurt, cream cheese, or mayonnaise instead of the high fat.

For mashed potatoes, you might try using chicken or vegetable broth instead of butter or margarine to reduce the fat and calories.

Modifying some recipes may not always produce the desired taste or texture. You might want to test the recipe on your family before including it in a regular holiday meal.

Many traditional holiday foods by themselves are healthful and nutritious but are embellished in ways that take away from their nutritional value. Sweet potatoes, for example, contain fiber as well as vitamins A and C. A medium-sized baked sweet potato contains about 100 calories, but many people add sugar, butter, and other ingredients, which really adds the calories. A baked sweet potato with a little brown sugar and cinnamon is far healthier than one topped with butter, sugar and marshmallows.

Fresh cranberries are another healthy option for holiday recipes. Unlike canned cranberries or cranberry sauce, which often contain added sugar, fresh cranberries are naturally healthful.

Fresh cranberries contain phytonutrients and have anti-inflammatory properties that can promote health and may reduce the risk of disease. Adding fresh cranberries to salads and baked items such as muffins, cookies and pies is also a good way to sneak in some extra nutrition and flavor."

Leaving the skin on a turkey during cooking and removing it before serving to reduce the overall fat content.

For vegetable dishes, the healthiest method of cooking is either steaming or roasting, using a small amount of oil or cooking spray.

And, for many dishes, adding herbs and spices can enhance flavor without adding fat or calories.

One source of healthy holiday recipes is AgriLife Extension's [Dinner Tonight](#) website. The Dinner Tonight program aims to promote family mealtime by providing quick, easy, healthful and cost-effective recipes. In addition to recipes, the program provides free weekly video demonstrations of cooking tips and techniques along with information on nutrition, menu planning and healthy living.

Source: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service