

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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*“Game plan for the ‘Season of Eating’”*

What a time of year! There is sure to be no shortage of Halloween candy, holiday sweet gifts, and family meals. Over-indulging tends to be something that gets many of us. As my grandma used to tell me. Your eyes are bigger than your stomach! These trends even carry all the way through New Year’s Day.

Similar to athletes entering a sports season, we must prepare ourselves for the holiday eating season. In the grand scheme of things, we are just celebrating for a 3-, 4- or 5-day period. So, what we need to focus on is not over-indulging every single day.

It’s easy to fall in the mindset of, well I can eat as much as I want through the holidays and just worry about it after the first of the year. But it is important that we are 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.

When it comes to holiday meals, one healthy strategy is to think about which recipes are important to you and your family. Then let the rest of the food go and provide some fruit and vegetables and an opportunity for a walk after the meal. Not only for you, but for your entire family. Maybe your family could settle on 5 –10 of your favorite recipes that tend to lead to over-indulgence. Then make half for one holiday meal and half for another to ensure you are getting to taste your favorite goodies at some point throughout the holiday season.

Add fruit 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.

Some tips for healthy recipes include the use of low-salt versions of ingredients. For example, a popular comfort food during colder months is chili. Choose low-salt beans and tomatoes and create 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, you can substitute two egg whites for each egg in the recipe. Eat regular meals before the gathering. The temptation is to think that you should starve yourself during the day so that you can indulge later. That’s not a healthy attitude and usually results in you feeling worse afterwards.

Happy holidays, everyone!

Information comes from K-State Research and Extension nutrition, health and wellness agent, Sara Sawyer.