

By: Alisha Fisher

K-State Research and Extension Greenwood County

Family and Community Wellness Extension Agent

“Mindful Holiday Eating”

A highlight of the holiday season for many is the food. Everyone has their favorite traditional dishes that bring back memories of past celebrations. While it's easy to be tempted by second helpings, a little mindfulness can make the holidays more enjoyable and leave you feeling your best. Try to eat slowly and stop when you're about 80% full. Overeating often leads to spending the rest of the day feeling uncomfortable instead of enjoying time with family and friends. Eating slowly allows your body to recognize when it's full and helps prevent overindulgence. If you're helping in the kitchen, be mindful of how many “taste tests” you take while cooking, grazing throughout the day can leave you full before the meal even begins. When planning appetizers, consider lighter options such as fruit or vegetable trays paired with lean proteins. These are also great choices for kids to snack on. Try to avoid sugary desserts and high-fat snacks before the main meal.

It's common to skip breakfast or lunch in anticipation of a large holiday dinner, but this can actually lead to overeating later. Instead, start your day with a healthy breakfast and a light lunch such as a salad to help manage hunger. Stay hydrated by drinking water throughout the day, as it helps with digestion. When dessert time arrives, be selective. Sample your favorites, but take smaller portions and listen to your body's signals.

K-State Research and Extension Family Consumer Sciences Specialist Christina Holmes suggests making small changes to your favorite recipes to make them a bit healthier. Try reducing the amount of sugar, oil, or salt in your recipes, or experimenting with wheat flour in place of all-purpose flour. If you make modifications, test the recipe ahead of time to ensure it still tastes great before sharing it at your holiday gathering.

The holiday season is a time to connect with family and friends, and that can include being active together. After dinner, consider taking a walk or playing a friendly game of football. If the weather is nice, plan a scavenger hunt with the kids or start a new outdoor family tradition. If you have to stay indoors, bring everyone together for a board or card game that keeps the fun going. By staying mindful about what you eat and adding in a little movement, you can enjoy your favorite holiday traditions while feeling energized and comfortable long after the meal is over.

Information comes from Kansas State University Publications.