

UNIVERSITY OF  
MARYLAND

EXTENSION

*Solutions in your community*

# Holiday Health Survival Kit

December 2009

*(Equal Opportunity employer and equal access programs)*

# Outline

- The truth about weight gain during the Holidays.
- Triggers for overeating during the Holidays
- Tips for eating healthier & staying active over the Holidays

# How much do we really gain during the Holidays?

- Good news: people don't gain as much as they think during the Holidays – the average in a (NIH 2000) study was 1.05 pounds.
- Bad news: most do not lose the weight they gain; it accumulates (average after 1-year was 1.4 pounds)
- Two major factors influence weight gain: level of hunger and **level of activity**
- Overweight and obese volunteers were more likely to gain five pounds than were those who were not overweight

# The skinny...

- Since the average weight gain during adulthood is about one to two pounds a year, much of midlife weight gain can be explained by holiday eating.
- “The holiday season doesn’t represent one day of overeating. You have this period that extends through the new year where there’s more alcohol, more snacks, more finger foods and appetizers that are energy dense.” (Dr. Holly Hull University of Oklahoma)
- People who are **MORE** active do not gain as much or any weight

# What influences how much we eat?

## *The external factors*

- Location, location, location
  - Visible food tempts us to eat more without awareness
  - Looking at food makes us feel hungry!
- Size of the bowl *(Study by Brian Wansink, Cornell University)*
  - eg. Stale popcorn – even when the popcorn was 5 days old, people ate more from a larger bowl than they did from a smaller bowl!
  - Perception of what they ate did not match with reality!
  - Big bowls lead people to serve themselves more – even works with kids

# What influences how much we eat?

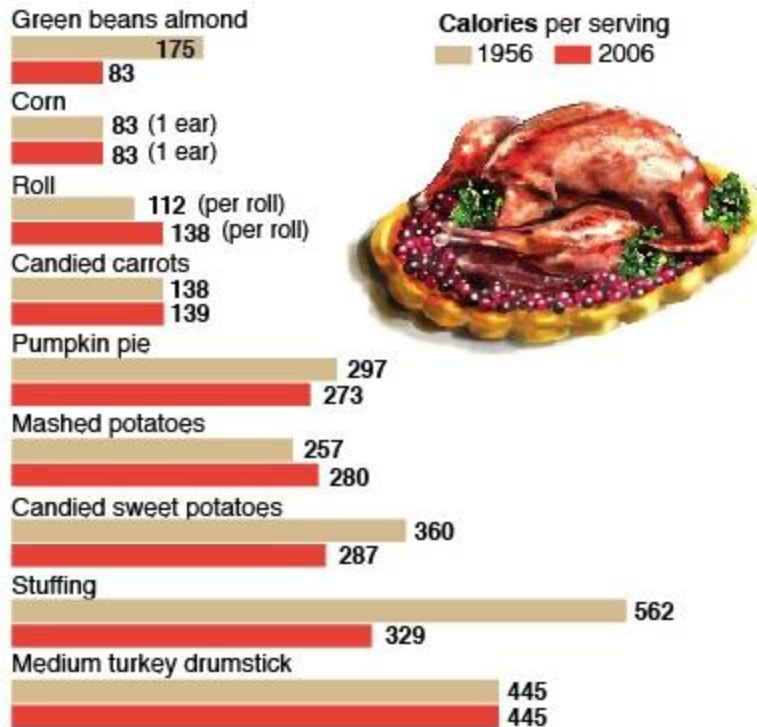
## *Fullness factor*

- People don't stop eating when they are full
- We don't feel full right away
  - Eg.; re-filling bowl
- We expect larger portions
  - Portions have grown at home, not just restaurants
- Pre-loading (eating while we cook), then sitting down to eat

# How Have the Calories in Thanksgiving Meals Changed Over the Years?

## Trimming down the trimmings

Researchers analyzed recipes published in 1956 and 2006 and found some dishes to have an overall reduction in calories.



SOURCES: Cornell University's Food and Brand Lab; USDA

AP

- Portion-sizes Have Most Likely Increased
  - “Serves 6-8” recipes being made for families of 3-4
- Plate sizes increased 30% since 1960
  - Serve 28% more on 12 vs. 10-inch plate; compounded with second and third helpings

Wansink, Brian and Laura E. Smith (2010), “Calorie Trends for Classic Thanksgiving Recipes 1900 to 2000,” *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, under review

# Holiday Parties How to: *Arriving & Surviving*

- Don't arrive hungry. If you are starving you may overeat. Eat a little something like yogurt, fruit, or lean meat before you go.
- For dessert, take a half piece or just a few bites.
- Drink water. Beverage calories can add up quickly.
  - A few glasses of sweet wine, apple cider, eggnog, fruit juices, pop and hot cocoa can easily add a few hundred calories to your meal.
- Watch portion sizes. You can enjoy all of your holiday favorites in moderation.

# Holiday Parties How to:

## *BYOF*

- Make healthy food and bring it along with you to the holiday meal. This way you will always have something healthy to eat in a dining room full of high calorie dishes.
  - A fresh fruit salad
  - Big salad tossed with shredded carrots, grape tomatoes, and sliced cucumbers. – Or make it festive with nuts, cranberries or pomegranate seeds & a sprinkle of goat cheese. Don't forget the low fat dressing.
  - Simply prepared vegetables such as steamed carrots or green beans
  - Vegetable tray with a low fat dip

# Holiday Parties How to:

## *Choose you seat well*

- Sit AWAY from the food table
- Face AWAY from the food table
- MOVE AWAY from the snack bowls
- Keep water or low calorie beverage in your hand

# Holiday Parties How to:

## *Be Picky*

- Love what you eat! Choose your favorites. Leave off the items that are just there as part of traditional holiday celebrations, but are not really your favorites.
- Take larger portions of healthier options such as the turkey, fresh fruit and vegetables and smaller portions of the more calorie dense foods like mashed potatoes with gravy, marshmallow topped sweet potatoes and white bread roll with butter.

# The Snack bowl

- Do NOT eat directly out of the bowl!
- Take what you are going to eat on a plate or napkin
- Sit AWAY from the bowl to eat!
- Are you about to eat a full meal? Just take a low calorie drink and avoid the snack!



# Appetizers

- Choose vegies
- Light on the dip; salsa is a good choice
- Skip fried, cheesey, fatty meats & creamy
- Remember a meal usually follows – save the calories for the good stuff



# The Dreaded Buffet: Behavior

- Take the smallest plate available
- Choose your tactic:
  - Do I want a little of everything OR just enjoy just a few things?
- Position yourself well
  - Away from the table - On the other side of the room
  - Get everything you need the first time so you don't have to go back
  - Go to the back of the line
- Eat slowly – enjoy.
- You DON'T have to eat your money's worth!

# The Dreaded Buffet: Choices

- Salads & Vegetables
  - Choose un-dressed salads rather than mayonnaise based; add a light dressing
  - Grab raw veggies. Take small portions of the dip on the side' and use sparingly.
  - Choose vegetable sides without cheese or cream sauce
  - Vary the colors: reds, orange/yellow, greens, whites and blue/purple.
- Choose only 1 or 2 entrees; don't try to get it all!

# The Dreaded Buffet: Choices

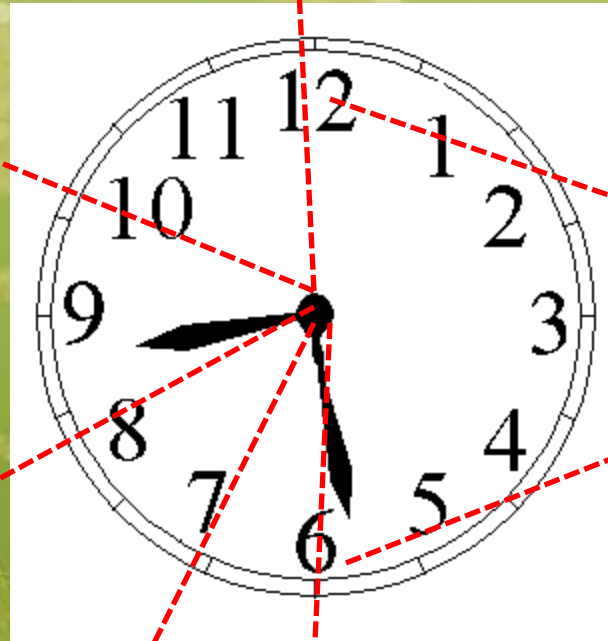
- Look for healthier grain products.
  - Even if a bread or cracker is dark in color doesn't necessarily mean it's a healthier, high fiber choice.
  - Stick with the lower fat choices, such as pita bread, pretzels and wheat thins.
  - Watch what goes ON the crackers, too. Salsas or other vegetable-based are usually good
- A handful of nuts,
  - Not low in calories, but a good source of protein, fiber, and heart-healthy fats.
- Grab fruit for the dessert

# Buffet tip: *Start eating at noon!*

10-12  
Sweet treat

8-10  
Grains: pretzels,  
pita, crackers

7-8  
Layer of nuts



Noon – 6  
Fill with  
Fruits &  
Vegetables

6 - 7  
Dip or Sauce

# Holiday meals at home & away

- Cues around our home can lead us to eat more
  - Try smaller plates – for serving & eating
  - Don't put food out everywhere
  - Store food out of sight
- Studies show that people's perception of taste depends greatly on what they expect
  - Food
  - Atmosphere
  - Effort

# Holiday Meal Overeating Problems

1. I Made it & I Deserve It
  - Effort!
2. The Pre-Load Problem
  - Eating while cooking
3. Keeping the Host Happy
  - Servings vs. how much you actually eat

# BE ACTIVE!!!

- Don't let busy-ness affect your exercise routine
  - Plan in physical activity
- Plan Holiday celebrations around activities
  - Ice-skating
  - Group walks
  - Family football game
  - Dancing



# And finally...

- Get enough rest and sleep
- Plan, plan, plan
- Try to stay out of the kitchen when possible
- Don't skip meals before celebrations
- Don't sweat the meal – it's the whole season that counts!