

T'IS THE SEASON FOR CULINARY DELIGHTS

The holiday season often centers around food for traditional and cultural reasons and for the sheer enjoyment of trying new food. Many of these wonderful foods are often rich and decadent incorporating high fat, salty or sugary ingredients. Eating healthy during the season can be a challenge. Here are a few ideas to help both guests and hosts meet the challenge.

For the guest: It may sound odd but eat before you go out - soup or a salad is a good option. Meals at holiday parties are often later than we are used to and by the time the meal starts we can be very hungry. We may eat as many calories from appetizers as from the dinner as we nibble at appetizers before the meal to be served. Eating a soup or salad in advance helps make sure, you will not be ravenous when you arrive at the party.

To counter drinking high calorie beverages, bring your own tomato juice, low calorie soda, flavoured water, coffee or flavoured tea. Drinking water between higher calorie alcoholic drinks will keep you hydrated and reduce the calories you drink.

Carry a full side plate around with you and a full drink. It is hard to eat if your hands are full. The host will be less likely to ply you with additional food if they see you with a full glass or plate. Stay far away from the appetizer table to resist temptation.

Most importantly, eat slowly, savour and enjoy the food.!

For the host: An interesting study using bowls of jelly beans showed how the way a food is served can influence how much people eat. The study found that people ate more and in some cases all the jelly beans when they were put in a large bowl together. When the jelly beans were in small bowls sorted by colour people ate less. You can use this same principle for appetizers. Try putting out smaller plates of appetizers so guests can pace themselves. You can have other appetizer plates ready in the kitchen and bring them out as plates are finished.

Instead of traditional higher fat crackers and dips, use vegetables such as cucumbers, apples, or jicama, as the "chip" or seek out chips made with beans that are lower in fat and have higher fibre and protein. Offer more nutritious dips like chick pea dip (humus), eggplant dip (baba ganoush), low fat yogurt, cucumber (tzatziki), low fat sour cream or cream cheese with strong herb flavourings.

Use the same trick that restaurants and caterers use. If you are having a buffet, start with lower calorie items first (salads, cooked or roasted vegetables) and put higher calorie items like meat and desserts at the other end. As guests' plates fill up, there is less room for the higher calorie foods.

If you want to serve a traditional rich dessert, then balance the meal with a roast or seafood as the main entree. For example, I cooked mussels in a tomato broth with hearty whole grain bread and roasted vegetables on the side and served a rich traditional Filipino Cashew Nut Dessert. Or, have the guests make their dinner, like a Chinese Mongolian Hot Pot similar to a fondue using a broth. Guests can cook meat or seafood and then dip cooked food into an assortment of sauces. At the end of the meal, noodles and vegetables are added to the rich broth and consumed. The meal is eaten over a longer period of time allowing for more time to converse and digest the meal.

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