

Healthy Holidays



The holidays are fast approaching and as they near our calendars fill with festive activities, family gatherings and opportunities for delicious seasonal treats. In addition to roasted turkey or honey glazed ham, our appetites are tempted with pumpkin pie, Christmas cookies and assorted chocolates, not to mention rich side dishes loaded with savory carbs. The food options are endless, and while delectable, much of our holiday favorites are loaded with sugar.

According to the University of California San Francisco, sugar consumption based on an average 2000 calorie diet should not exceed 25 grams for women and 38 grams for men. For most, the recommendation is surpassed not once but twice over. The standard American consumes 82 grams of sugar daily. During the holidays, this number can sky-rocket.

A study conducted by Associated British Foods noted that the average person eats over 7000 calories Christmas day. While this may seem like a lot, it isn't difficult to do. Many of us visit multiple family and friends Christmas day, eating dinner at each or perhaps just an extra dessert. There are 215 calories and 20 grams of sugar in a 4 oz slice of honey glazed ham. The size of this serving is equivalent to a deck of cards which isn't enough for most of us. Throw in some cheesy potatoes, stuffing and a roll on the side and a Christmas dinner can add up to over 1000 calories and 100 grams of sugar in one meal.

The effects of sugar one day a year won't necessarily place you at an immediate health risk. However, overindulgence overtime can lead to diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. At the very least, overconsumption of sugar may cause weight gain. Elevated levels of insulin in the blood cause the body to store more calories as fat. Likewise, insulin effects leptin, a hormone that works as an appetite suppressant, helping us know when we have had enough.

So how can you ensure a healthy holiday season while still enjoying the festivities? Here are four helpful suggestions from our staff for those who are health conscious stay mindful.

Eat smaller portions. Treating yourself isn't horrible. In fact, avoiding sweets all together may backfire. By withholding temptation, you may find yourself overcompensating later. Let yourself partake in holiday cheer. Don't overfill your plate and take a smaller piece of pie.

Keep snacks out of sight and out of mind. If you have snacks stashed for the big day, put them up. Don't open the bag. Keeping them closed up reduces the temptation to grab a few chocolates or a cookie beforehand. Eat throughout the day. Eating small meals consistently will regulate your blood sugar, reducing cravings for something sweet.

Don't center your gathering around food. Plan other activities such as games or caroling. We hope each of you enjoys the coming holiday season, having a very Happy Thanksgiving and a Merry Christmas!