

Healthy Eating During The Festive Season

By Dietetics Department, NUH



The festive season is approaching again! Yes, with Hari Raya Puasa, Christmas and the New Year just round the corner, you will probably be smack dab in the middle of the holiday season and surrounded by treats galore. Certainly, with the hustle and bustle that is part of the season, it is easy to veer off the health track. So, how are you going to avoid pounding on desserts, appetizers, cakes, chips and all other scrumptious delights that will line the tables of these festive get-togethers? Well, the good news is - you do not need to avoid these tempting treats completely. All you need to be mindful about is to - eat less sugar, less fats, less salt and eat more fibre foods.

To help you stay fit and healthy for the brand new year, our Dietetics Department offers some tips on how to maintain a healthy and balanced diet while enjoying the foods at these social gatherings.

1 Watch Out For The Hidden Fats!

At the snack table, instead of loading your plate up to the brim with pastries, cakes, biscuits or pizzas, just take a couple of items to nibble on. These creamy and sugary foods contain a lot of fats and calories. Opt for lean meat that is tasty but not deep-fried. Even if you remove the fat and skin from the fried chicken drumstick, you will still be consuming about 8g of fats! Avoid adding gravy or sauces on the food as you are actually adding extra calories, fats and salt to your food!

If you can't resist all these sugary and fattening foods, use a smaller plate at the buffet so that you will pick up less food. When all else fails, have fruits, salad or vegetables first (without the dressing of course!) before taking other dishes. This helps to make you feel a little fuller which will prevent you from excessive eating!

2 Watch What You Drink!

A wide selection of drinks such as cocktails and fizzy drinks are usually served at holiday parties and buffets. Such drinks contain a lot of hidden calories and sugar. You too, can join the celebration "toast" with minimal or no fizzy drinks. Here are some good alternatives to sweetened drinks that will provide you with healthy benefits:

- If you're served fruit juice or cordial, dilute it with iced water.
- Take diet drinks or iced water.
- Try to drink your tea or coffee without sugar. If that is not possible, gradually cut back on the sugar or go for artificial sweetener.
- Just ask for water at the party... It is the healthiest drink that you can ever find!

3 If You Are Cooking...

If you are cooking, you should try to reduce the amount of oil, salt, sugar used. As far as possible, remove all visible skin and fats while preparing your dishes. Avoid cooking deep-fried foods. Steaming, grilling or boiling are healthier cooking methods. If you are using milk for your dishes, avoid coconut milk but use low fat milk instead. Prepare stews or soups in advance, let them cool before you trim off any visible fats from the surface.

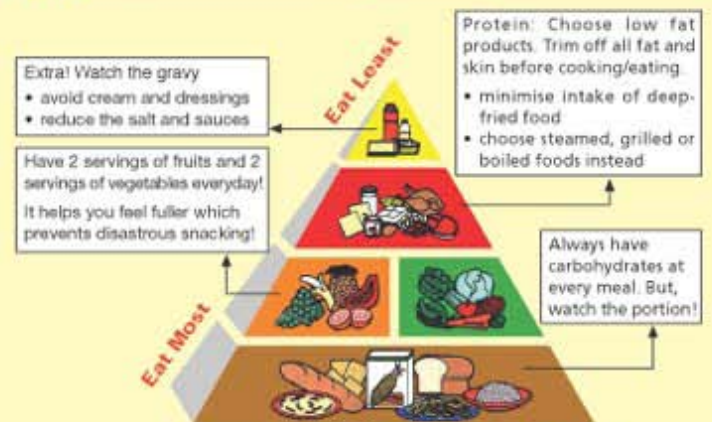
4 The Balancing Act

So much about healthy eating habits... It's also important that you spend some time exercising, especially since you'll probably be eating a lot of junk food. Check out these ideas for staying in shape over the holiday season:

- Take the stairs instead of taking the lift.
- Park your car further from your destination so that you get a chance to walk.
- If you are taking a bus, alight 1-2 stops earlier and walk to your destination.



5 Stick To A Healthy Eating Plan



A Balanced Diet - The Pyramid Way

The diagram illustrates tips to healthy eating. The key is to apply these simple tips in your daily life and remember to balance what you eat with what you do - exercise at least 3 times a week. By eating a balanced diet and exercising regularly, you can give yourself the best chance of living a fit and healthy life.