News Release

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**Simple Recipe Alterations Can Make Holiday Foods Healthier**

COLLEGE STATION – Holiday meals can be healthier and taste just as good by using basic recipe substitutions or alterations, said an expert in the nutrition and food sciences department of Texas A&M University, College Station.

“The sugar, fat or sodium content of many holiday recipes can be reduced without a noticeable difference in taste,” said Dr. Jenna Anding, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service specialist, College Station.

Anding said reducing sugar, salt and fat content as well as watching the amount eaten are effective ways of making the holidays healthier.

“For example, if a recipe calls for a cup of sugar, try using three-fourths or two-thirds of a cup,” she said. “If it calls for a half-cup of oil, shortening or other fat, try using one-third cup.”

For those who are watching their sodium intake, Anding advises consumers read the Nutrition Facts label on the food package and select options that have lower amounts of sodium.

“Speaking of salt, don’t immediately reach for the salt shaker before you taste the food,” she said.

Anding suggested using reduced-fat or non-fat cheese, milk, cream cheese, cottage cheese, yogurt or mayonnaise instead of their higher-fat counterparts.

“For mashed potatoes, try using defatted broth instead of butter to reduce both fat and calories,” she said.

Anding said modifying more complicated recipes may not always produce the desired texture, so it’s best to test the recipe individually or on a few friends or family members before going “all in” on the revised recipe.

“Also, many traditional holiday foods can be healthy and nutritious choices, so long as they are prepared properly and not ‘embellished’ in ways that take away from that nutritional value,” she noted. “For example, she said, if cooking a turkey leave the skin on to contain the flavor, but then remove it afterward to reduce the fat content. Or baste the turkey in its own juice, or use a defatted broth.”

For holiday vegetable dishes, the healthiest method of cooking is either steaming or roasting the vegetables using a small amount of oil or cooking spray, Anding said. And adding herbs and spices can enhance flavor without adding fat or calories.

“One holiday favorite, the sweet potato, contains fiber as well as vitamins A and C. A medium-sized baked sweet potato contains about 100 calories,” she said. “The problem is when you embellish them with added sugar, butter and other ingredients. A baked sweet potato with a little bit of brown sugar and cinnamon is a far healthier option then one topped with butter and lots of marshmallows.”

Anding said another popular holiday food, cranberries, contains phytonutrients and has anti-inflammatory properties that can promote health and may reduce the risk for disease.

“Adding fresh cranberries to salads and baked items such as muffins, cookies and pies is a good way to sneak in some extra nutrition and flavor,” she said.

Even with healthier ingredients and preparation techniques, it’s important to remember to exercise restraint at holiday meals, Anding noted.

“Because holidays provide more opportunities to eat due to social gatherings, office parties and other festivities, try to plan accordingly so you can keep your calorie intake in check,” she said.  “And don’t forget about scheduling in regular physical activity to help burn off those extra calories and relieve some of the stress often associated with the holidays.”

For more food and nutrition information and resources, visit the Extension Food and Nutrition YouTube channel at <https://bit.ly/2ORn2qc> or go to <https://fch.tamu.edu/>.

For more information on family and consumer science related topics go to [www.haskell.agrilife.org](http://www.haskell.agrilife.org) or like us on Facebook at: Haskell County 4-H and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Also, contact Darlene Hopkins- the Haskell County Extension Agent for Family and Community Health at 101 S. Ave D, Haskell, Texas- phone # 940-864-2658.

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