Healthy Holidays: K-State experts suggest exercise, eating in moderation

Self-restraint can help make holidays more enjoyable

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Admit it: It can be oh-so-tantalizingly-hard to say no to a second helping of Thanksgiving turkey and mashed potatoes, or another helping of pumpkin pie.

But a pair of K-State Research and Extension experts say having a little self-restraint can help to make the holiday more enjoyable.

“You know, the holidays are fantastic,” said Ashley Svaty, a family and consumer sciences specialist in K-State’s Northwest Research and Extension Center. “We have family, we have food…but the thing about the holidays is that we don’t want to be uncomfortable because then we can’t enjoy the time with our families.”

When it comes to dinner, Svaty suggests “eating slowly until you’re about 80% full, so you can enjoy your family and not be stuck on the couch feeling uncomfortable the rest of the day."

Christina Holmes, a family and consumer sciences specialist in K-State Research and Extension’s southeast region, said over-eating can sneak up on you, especially if you’re in the kitchen.

“Sometimes as we’re cooking meals, we’re grazing throughout the day, trying samples of everything,” she said. “By the time we’re ready to eat, we’re already full, so I suggest being mindful of how much we’re eating and what appetizers we’re offering.”

Holmes said fruit and vegetable trays and lean proteins are good choices for appetizers or pre-meal snacks, especially for children. Avoid sweet treats and high-fat foods before the main meal.

“Often we go into a holiday get-together and we don’t eat all day because we want to savor those foods (during the main meal),” Holmes said. “But that really leads to over-eating and eventually feeling miserable. So don’t hesitate to eat a healthy breakfast, then eat a salad or healthy lunch before you go to the party. Make sure you’re staying hydrated throughout the day,
and then go and enjoy those foods that you normally love, and then maybe you don’t have to eat quite as much.”

When it’s time for dessert, “I would recommend to be choosy,” Svaty said. “You can try different things, but be choosy on the favorites that you like and listen to your body. Don’t stuff yourself.”

Other tips for a healthy holiday include:

**Modify recipes.** Holmes suggests considering minor changes to some recipes, such as reducing the amount of sugar or oil added. “You can even dabble with trying simple wheat flour as a substitute for all purpose flour,” she said.

“If you make modifications, try the product ahead of time to make sure you like it, then take it to your holiday get-together.”

**Go for a walk.** The holidays should be about spending time with family and friends, so after dinner, consider a brisk walk or other activity. “Go outside and play football or something around the house,” Svaty said. If it has recently snowed, build a snowman together as a family.

“Maintaining a regular physical activity routine is really important for your mental health, as well,” Holmes said. If the weather cooperates, plan a scavenger hunt with the kids; implement some new family traditions...Indoors, maybe you have a dance party with the kids after dinner or doing some other fun exercises.”

**Shop ahead.** Check cupboards to see what foods you may already have in stock, then consider buying needed foods a little at a time, rather than waiting for one big grocery trip.

More information on healthy eating and holiday tips is available at local extension offices in Kansas.

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**Source**
Ashley Svaty
785-462-6281
asvaty@ksu.edu

Christina Holmes
620-421-4826
christinaholmes@ksu.edu
Story by:
Pat Melgares
melgares@ksu.edu