Ingredient substitutions can make favorite holiday foods more healthy

K-State extension agent shares simple substitutions for traditional dishes

By Lisa Moser, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Pumpkin pie, green bean casserole and homemade breads are a few of the traditional foods that Americans enjoy around the holiday table. Delicious, for sure, but they may not always be the healthiest choices.

Clara Wicoff, a nutrition, food and health agent in K-State Research and Extension’s Southwind Extension District, says simple ingredient adjustments can make food more nutritious without sacrificing taste.

“The average American gains one pound per year over the holidays,” Wicoff said. “While that may not sound like much, over time that weight can contribute to chronic health conditions like diabetes and heart disease. By adopting healthy lifestyle behaviors, some of those diseases can be prevented or controlled.”

One way to do that is to reduce large amounts of fats and sugars found in many holiday recipes, Wicoff said.

“We want to make sure our important holiday traditions are cherished, but also make the recipes healthier,” Wicoff said.

She said a couple easy substitutions are to use a sugar substitute in place of sugar, or adjust the milk from whole to low fat or skim. She also said it is healthier to use oil instead of margarine.

With bread, Wicoff encourages people to use half white flour and half whole grain flour instead of just white flour.

In some cases, a new recipe may be the best option.
“Instead of a traditional pumpkin pie, people could serve a crustless pumpkin pie, or instead of serving an apple pie, make slow cooker baked apples,” Wicoff said.

She added: “If you’re worried about the tastiness of a traditional recipe, you can use herbs and spices, or even just smaller amounts of the added fats and sugars and it will still taste good and be healthier.”

Also, Wicoff said, a healthier holiday table can still be balanced with the traditional family recipes.

“There are some recipes in my family we are always going to make the same way because it is a part of our tradition,” Wicoff said. “But even if we switch out one or two recipes, it can provide us a healthier overall meal.”

Wicoff recommended a couple online publications from the K-State Research and Extension bookstore to help consumers as they begin their holiday cooking preparations:

- Focus on the ‘Stars’: Cooking Healthy for the Holidays.
- K-State Research and Extension ingredient substitution publication

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story:

Focus on the 'Stars': Healthy Cooking for the Holidays,

K-State Research and Extension ingredient substitution publication,

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