

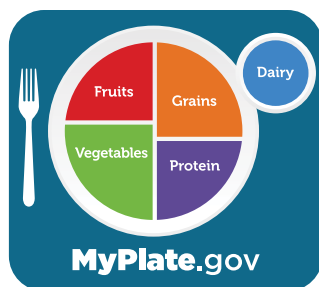
7 Tips for Healthier Holiday Meals

The holidays are a time of celebration, reflection and good food. Save money by preparing food at home. Follow these seven tips to make your holiday favorites healthier and memorable without sacrificing flavor or nostalgia.



1. Plan your menu.

- The icon of nutrition recommendations found at [MyPlate.gov](https://www.myplate.gov) is based on the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans. This guidance can be used year-round to build well-balanced plates that include your holiday favorites.
- Try to include at least three of the five food groups on your plate.
 - Fruits such as apple slices, fresh or dried figs, or canned fruit in juice or light syrup
 - Vegetables such as roasted carrots, fresh or frozen vegetables, and baked squash
 - Grains such as flat bread, cornbread and whole-grain foods (crackers, chips, bread and tortillas). Swap half of the white flour with whole-grain flour in quick breads.
 - Proteins such as lean baked ham, cooked beans and roasted turkey
 - Dairy such as cow's milk or fortified soy milk, shredded cheese and ricotta cheese



2. Choose lower-fat options.

- Try swapping half of the fat in your favorite desserts with alternatives. For example, fat in brownies and quick breads can be replaced, at least partially, with applesauce, mashed bananas or pureed dates.
- Make healthy swaps in your favorite recipes to reduce calories.
 - Swap whole milk with fat-free cow's milk, soy milk or other calcium-rich beverages.
 - Swap cream with evaporated fat-free milk or half and half.
 - Swap sour cream with fat-free or low-fat sour cream or plain Greek yogurt.
 - Swap full-fat cream cheese with lower-fat cheese.
 - Use oil in place of solid fat when possible.

3. Limit added sweeteners in recipes and beverages.

- Try reducing sugar by one-quarter to one-third in baked goods and desserts. This works best with quick breads, cookies, pie fillings, custard, puddings and fruit crisps. However, do not decrease the amount of sugar in yeast breads because it provides food for the yeast and promotes rising.
- Provide infused water (with fruit and/or herbs) as an alternative to sweetened beverages.

4. Decrease sodium in your menu items.

- Reduce the amount of sodium in your dishes without sacrificing flavor by using different ingredients and spices or herbs.
- Substitute herbs and spices for salt.
 - **Herbs:** Basil, cilantro, chives, sage, rosemary, oregano, thyme, dill, parsley, etc.
 - **Spices:** Nutmeg, garlic, pepper, paprika, chili powder, cumin, ginger, etc.
- Buy low-sodium or no-sodium-added canned broth, vegetables, beans, sauces and flavorings.
- Drain and rinse canned beans and vegetables to reduce sodium by about 40%.
- Limit meats high in sodium such as bacon and cold cuts, or choose reduced-sodium options.
- Provide fresh fruits and vegetables instead of prepackaged snacks.

5. Try different cooking methods.

- Certain cooking methods, such as frying in butter or solid shortening, add saturated fat to your meals. Different cooking methods can add new textures and flavors.
 - Roasting uses dry heat to cook foods at high temperatures in the oven or over an open flame. Try roasting beef or potatoes.
 - Steaming uses moist heat of boiling water to create steam that heats food. Try steaming broccoli or green beans.
 - Baking in an oven or air fryer uses dry heat to cook foods in an enclosed space.

6. Add more vegetables to your meals.

- The fiber and nutrients present in vegetables help with satisfying hunger and regulating digestion. More vegetables in your diet can replace foods higher in salt, saturated fat and added sugars.
 - Try vegetable side dishes such as roasted root vegetables, broccoli salad or sweet potato casserole.
- Add more vegetables to soups, casseroles and main dishes.
 - Cornbread with sweet corn
 - Lasagna with bell pepper, kale or eggplant slices
- Experiment with different vegetables and cooking methods to find your favorite combination of textures and flavors.

7. Use different protein sources.

- Different sources of protein can offer additional nutrition benefits while still being high in protein.
 - Lean cuts of meat, such as lean ground beef, turkey and lamb, add less saturated fat.
 - Plant-based sources of protein such as tofu, nuts and seeds naturally have no cholesterol.
 - Seafood, such as salmon and herring, offer omega-3 fatty acids.
 - Legumes and grains, such as lentils and quinoa, are good sources of fiber.

Finally, when you are enjoying a sentimental recipe from a relative, use the original recipe and cut the pieces smaller.

More information from NDSU Extension

See [“Now You’re Cookin’: Recipe Makeovers!”](#) (FN1447)

See the [“Vary Your Veggies”](#) series (FN1452–1467) and the [“Focus on Whole Fruits”](#) series (FN1843–FN1846)

For more information about nutrition, food safety and health, visit www.ag.ndsu.edu/food

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