

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Don't Give Up on the Diet

Just because we've had one big-meal holiday and have several more around the corner, don't give up on your healthy eating. There are ways to avoid the extra 8 pounds that other folks might gain between Thanksgiving and New Year's. Adding those extra pounds is so common that researchers at Tufts University have been researching just what it is, besides the food itself, that makes us eat 20,000 extra calories in a period of several weeks. Some of their findings are very interesting.

For one thing - guests! They found that more guests at the table meant that everyone was likely to eat more. In fact, each extra guest was worth 35 more calories per meal. Holiday music and a party atmosphere also increase the amount we eat. That's one reason why nursing homes, who are trying to get many of their residents to eat more, often have parties, decorations and music. The music effect accounts for an extra 100 calories per meal. Turn off the CD player! Or just play non-holiday tunes.

Another factor - variety! The more variety, the more different foods there are on the table, the more we're likely to eat. Of course we want to try 'just a taste' of every new dish. But often we take more than 'a taste' to start. And then we go back for more, and more, of the best ones. Keep the selection simple and no one will be so tempted.

Unfortunately, the simple fact that it all tastes so good also seems to affect our hunger. When we have one great meal, our bodies seem to anticipate that the next meal will also be great, so it ramps up the hunger. It gets us ready to eat extra again! The Tufts researchers think that this comes from eons ago, when we could eat well if someone killed a mastodon. And that much meat would mean there would be another big meal soon after, because you don't eat an elephant in one day! At that time being able to chow down days in a row allowed our bodies to store up extra for the next month when there would be very little. But now, we just keep eating and eating. Plus, the work of going to the grocery store doesn't use as many calories as finding and dragging home the elephant!

Another interesting bit they've found is that our common trick of eating just carrots before the big meal doesn't help. Instead of helping to balance out the calories, what that does is leave us hungrier when we do sit down to dinner. So we end up eating even more. And often what we chose to eat when we're hungry is not as healthy.

So what can we do to help ourselves? Here are their tips. Fill up before the meal! But fill up on lower calorie, high fiber foods. The fiber will help keep us feeling full longer. Besides the carrots and celery sticks, add in a bowl or two of bran cereal.

At dinner, keep passing the dishes around. Try to ensure that what ends up landing beside your plate is either what you don't like, or is something with lower calories. If the candied yams are at the other end of the table, you're less likely to take seconds. And park yourself away from the bar or serving line at a buffet too.

If you're the host, make sure you put more lower calorie foods such as salads and vegetables on the table, and fewer of the ones loaded with butter and sugar. Start with a soup, and be sure to serve salad too. Then serve green beans, plus broccoli, asparagus and zucchini. If you serve yams, then skip the mashed potatoes and bread.

Here's a healthier option for dessert, a one-crust apple pie. It's tricky though, because the crust is on top, not the bottom. And it uses a baking pan, not a pie plate! Happy, healthy holidays!

Square Apple Pie

3½ lbs. apples, peeled, cored, sliced	1 Tbsp unsalted butter or margarine
2 – 4 Tbsp (packed) brown sugar	2 tsp apple pie spice
1 prepared crust for a 9-inch pie (about 10½-inches), preferably whole-wheat	
1 Tbsp. milk	2 tsp sugar

Preheat oven to 400° F. Coat 13" x 9" x 2" baking dish with cooking spray and set aside. In large skillet, melt butter over medium-high heat. Add sliced apples, stirring to coat with butter. Cook until apples look shiny and wet and slices are tender, about 6 minutes, stirring 4 or 5 times. Off heat, add brown sugar and spice, mix well. Spread in prepared baking dish and set aside. Roll pie crust into 9 inch square. Cut into 3 strips, then cut strips into 3 squares each. Slightly stretch each piece with rolling pin. Lay on top of apples in 3 rows so they don't quite touch. Brush top of each piece with milk just to lightly moisten. Sprinkle sugar evenly over pieces of crust. Bake for 30-35 minutes, or until crusts are deep golden brown and apples are tender but still hold their shape. Cool to lukewarm or room temperature before serving. For crisp crust, this pie is best served the day it is baked. Serves 8-10. Adapted from Am. Institute for Cancer Research.

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