

Health for the Holidays and into the New Year



Without a doubt one of the best gifts you can give yourself for the holidays and into the New Year is good health. In fact, many would say that without your health you really can't enjoy other gifts or aspects of your life. Almost everyone would say their health is vitally important!

This time of the year many of us feel that our health takes a lower priority. There are many demands on our time and our personal stress may be at high levels and often our positive lifestyle behaviors such as adequate physical activity, healthy eating, and adequate rest get put on the back burner! What is ironic is those are the very behaviors can help us to reduce our stress and provide the energy we need to meet the greater demands in our life (I think there is a vicious circle here!)

What are some things you can do to make this a healthier holiday season and end of the year??

1. **Plan Ahead**—Eat a light snack before a party to prevent overindulgence. Allow yourself one plate of food, filling as much of it as you can with colorful vegetables, and then find someone interesting to visit with away from the food! Don't skip meals and "save up" for parties—you will be so famished that it will be difficult to moderate your eating. Eating 5-6 small meals/day may boost your metabolism. Stay a step ahead of cravings by preventing them. Eat every 3-5 hours to keep from becoming over hungry and making poor choices due to cravings and a low blood sugar level.
2. **Drink Sensibly**-Limit alcohol and high calorie drinks such as punch and eggnog. (4 ounces of eggnog and 1 shot of rum or bourbon+ 500 calories)Fill up on water—it quenches your thirst the best! Warm liquids such as clear soup, tea and coffee can also be filling and may help you limit your intake if consumed before a meal or snack.
3. **Go green!** Remember to eat your veggies and leafy green salads. They are packed with nutrients and fiber and low in calories and help to curb your appetite. Veggies and/or fruits should cover at least ½ of your plate at lunch and dinner. That leaves ¼ of the plate for a whole grain and ¼ for a lean protein source.
4. **Portion control**- Use an appetizer/bread for parties and a lunch size plate for meals instead of a larger dinner plate. Remember you don't have to eat huge portions to enjoy special holiday foods. You just need to savor every bite!
5. **Get distracted**- Try to take the focus off of food at social gatherings by engaging in conversation, games, puzzle building or watch a movie or take a walk. Pop a mint or stick of gum to keep yourself from continuing to snack.

6. **Limit your baking-** While it's fun to make cookies and other traditional baked goods, this may provide too much temptation around the house unless you share with others. If you host a party, be sure to share leftover food with your guests as they leave.
7. **Be mindful and enjoy-** Forget the all-or-nothing mindset. Depriving yourself of special holiday foods or feeling guilty when you do enjoy them, isn't a healthful eating strategy. Savor and enjoy small amounts of the foods you truly enjoy.
8. **Be active-** Find new ways to move your body—dancing, cross country skiing or snow shoeing, sledding, ice skating—we tend to do less exercise during cold weather months—find something you enjoy and you are more likely to stick with it! Beat the crowds to the gym this month—they will all show up in the New Year.
9. **Try to limit your stress-** Think about what is really important in your life and try to let go of the little things that really do not matter. When you feel stress levels mounting, sit down and take several deep breaths. Try to visualize yourself in a favorite place—think of the sounds, smells and sights associated with that place. Rest there in your mind for a few minutes.

Even if you just picked one or two of these to focus on you would be taking a moving in a forward direction to make a positive difference in your health. For those of you wanting accountability for your health goals, please contact me about setting up your FREE lifestyle counseling appointments that are offered to ISU employees by the ISU Benefits Office as part of your health benefits. Together we can do great things for your health!

Be sure to check out the attached newsletter on setting SMART goals for the New Year!
Watch for announcement about Live Healthy Iowa State challenge to begin Jan. 14, 2009.

Enjoy your time off and holidays with loved ones!

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