

Celebrate the Christmas holidays in good health

By **Jodi Schneider**
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Everybody's got their own Christmas traditions, especially in the way of what they're eating that day.

In a recent article, *Time Magazine* reported that Americans consume an estimated 22 million turkeys on Christmas. They also purchase an estimated 318 million pounds of ham around the holidays.

The Christmas ham, also known as the Yule ham, comes from an English tradition. It is said that the tradition started with the Germans, who wanted to appease Freyr, the god of fertility, harvest and boars.

The turkey appeared on Christmas tables in England in the 16th century, and popular history tells of King Henry VIII being the first English monarch to have turkey for Christmas.

If the thought of planning Christmas dinner makes you feel a little stressed, be glad you didn't live in the Renaissance period. The earliest known published Christmas menu included pork, beef, goose, lark, pheasant, venison, oysters, swan, and woodcock, to name just a few dishes, not including all the pastry desserts.

According to "The

Accomplish Cook," written in 1660 by Robert May, an English chef who trained in France and cooked for nobility throughout his life, "A bill of fare for Christmas Day and how to set the meat in Order," suggests 39 dishes split over two courses, plus oysters, oranges, lemons, and jellies for dessert.

New England didn't celebrate Christmas at all until well into the 19th century, and the typical 19th-century American Christmas dinner was chiefly root vegetables, with plenty of melted butter as "sauce." A typical dinner might include soup, fish, boiled ham, boiled turkey with oyster sauce, three roast ducks and satellite dishes of scalloped oysters, potatoes, parsnips, turnips and celery. Dessert might include a plum pudding; pastry, including cookies; fresh fruit, such as pears or apples; and bitter, black coffee, made by boiling the grounds for several days.

All that Christmas feasting was actually a countermeasure to the lean diet of the rest of the year. The bottom line for early Americans — overindulgence during the holiday readied the body for a long, cold winter.

Nowadays, an American Christmas dinner varies from one household to the next, but

often resembles the meal eaten on Thanksgiving. It generally features ham or turkey with stuffing, vegetables, mashed potatoes, and gravy. Christmas cookies and pies — apple, pumpkin, and pecan, the most common, are served for dessert and there's often plenty of eggnog to wash it all down.

Sweets and fat-rich foods that were a once-a-year indulgence for early settlers has now become readily available year-round. If they could visit our time, Colonial Americans might say that many of us now eat as though it were Christmas every day.

Before the 2019 holiday season kicked off, a new study into the health and diets of 2,000 Americans saw as many as 45 percent say they're postponing any resolution to eat clean or lose weight until after the festivities.

The research, commissioned by Herbalife Nutrition and conducted by OnePoll, investigated the true extent of holiday indulging and found the average person gains six pounds in holiday weight.

During the holiday season, the inability to resist temptations and overindulge has also seen 55 percent break a diet for home-cooked holiday food.

The results demonstrated that Americans feel justified

in eating all the holiday treats they want — even outside of the actual holidays. In fact, the average person will overeat on 13 separate days in the gap from Thanksgiving to the New Year. Yikes!

Here are a few tips from local nutritionist Sarah Wilder of Healthy Healed You for enjoying this year's holiday festivities and parties in between in a healthier way:

- If you are going to someone else's home, eat before you go. Have a good balance of proteins, fats, and carbs so that you are not overly hungry when you get there. Don't "starve" yourself all day or "save up your calories." You do not need to earn your food.

- Before you take that first bite, take a few slow, deep breaths and make sure you are in a relaxed state/mood. This is the only way you can properly digest that scrumptious food. Saying grace or sharing

things you are thankful for can also help you get to that relaxed state.

- Drink water before the meal begins. Then sip small amounts of your beverage of choice during the meal but try not to drink too much (of anything) during or immediately after the meal. It dilutes your digestive juices.

- Be mindful, if you choose to enjoy sugary sweets, really enjoy them. Notice the taste, notice how sweet they are, enjoy them thoroughly, then be done.

- When you get home, keep hydrated with water throughout the day and move your body. Take a walk, build a snowman, go to the gym, dance, or move however your body likes. But do move — even just a little. Your body, heart, mind, and spirit will thank you.

Above all, enjoy your time with family and friends.



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