



## **Healthful Traditions for any Special Occasion**

Special occasions, and especially the holiday season, can be a time of happiness, fellowship, refreshment, and spiritual renewal. But all too often the flurry of high-gear activity results in stress, overspending, overindulgence, sickness, and depression. How can we gear special occasions to maximize special opportunities for relationships and celebration without sacrificing health?

***Here are seven helpful tips:***

### **Make a splash**

It is easy to become dehydrated and distressed during the rush of the holiday season! Get your daily 8 glasses of refreshing, energizing water between meals! Avoid alcohol and caffeinated beverages. For that special social drink with friends, try fresh fruit juices mixed with juice spritzer or sparkling water as a nice replacement for the social-drink trap. Drink soothing herbal teas such as peppermint or chamomile for that over-stressed nervous system.

### **Get Picky!**

Start picking foods that help you deal with stress during the holidays. Pick fruit instead of quick-fix sugars and artificial stimulants. Enjoy an abundance of vegetables and beans, and take time for a healthy, whole grain breakfast. Stressed, busy people often turn to “quick fixes” in order to answer the body’s cry for good nutrition. Drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, caffeine, sugar, and junk foods stimulate the body’s stress responses and actually cause an increase in stress hormones and increased “stress susceptibility.”

### **Make Memory Meals!**

You want your celebration days to be filled with memories and good times. So, when you plan your meals, keep good health in mind.

High-fat, calorie-dense meals, huge portions, too much variety, and rich desserts cause grogginess, mental dullness, and poor memory. If you can hardly breathe, think, or stay awake after a meal, something is wrong. Meals should increase mental clarity, energy, and health. Focus on lighter fare, because the holiday season is a time to make memories, not follow traditions that cause you to lose them!

## **Nix Snacks!**

When you eat satisfying meals during the holiday season you have less of a desire to overindulge in high-calorie snacks. Grabbing quick, unhealthful snacks instead of taking time for wholesome, well-balanced meals adds pounds, does not provide meal satisfaction or nutrition, and overloads the digestive organs.

Take time to eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, and legumes at regular meal times. This will provide meal satisfaction, vitamins, minerals, fiber, antioxidants, and the complex carbohydrates your body needs for time-released energy and better overall blood sugar control.

## **Rest, Recreate & Rebound**

Proper sleep and daily exercise are potent stress-busters. Plan your schedule to get enough rest during the holidays. Losing just a few hours of sleep in a week can reduce your body's ability to fight disease by 30 percent. Getting adequate rest and sleep improves blood sugar control and lowers stress hormone levels.

Take ten! Taking just a 10-minute brisk walk can improve mood for one hour and reduce tension and fatigue. Plan daily outdoor exercise in the fresh air, or some form of exercise indoors if the weather is bad. When you take time to exercise, what you do at other times will be done better!

## **Pare Down! Or Wear Down!**

Pare down those stress-inducing activities and determine to cut out overeating, overspending, and overdoing. Plan special moments and activities that don't exhaust you or your budget and are not centered around rich food. Try vegetable minestrone, sesame crackers, and garbanzo hummus for supper instead of hamburgers, pie, and ice cream.

Or how about a delicious array of seasonal fruit with popcorn and nuts or whole grain bread and crackers? Have a warm, fireside gathering with inspiring stories instead of a raucous party with television droning in the background.

## **Create New Traditions**

There are some timeworn traditions that we hang on to out of habit, and they produce havoc rather than happiness! Overeating, excess, and frenzied shopping frazzle the nerves and fizzle the bank account! Helping others by promoting healthful activities will boost your own immune system while helping others to be temperate. In this way, you will create new and better traditions that leave you and your loved ones healthier, happier, and truly refreshed during the holiday season.