

## **Have a Happier and Healthier Holiday Season**

By Deb Maes, Extension Educator, Family & Consumer Resources

My daughter works at a large department store in Maine. She spent Halloween night taking down pumpkins and ghosts and putting up decorations for Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years. There we have it, the holiday season it officially upon us!

Unfortunately for many of us, Halloween is the start of several weeks of unhealthy eating. We just finish up the candy corn and chocolate bars and we start making our shopping list for Thanksgiving dinner. Once the turkey meal has been eaten, it's time for shopping, decorating houses and holiday parties.

I have a proposal to make. Let's make a November resolution to make the holiday season healthier for our families, our bodies and our pocketbooks.

Let's start with the seasonal menus. Traditional recipes call for lots of sugar, fat and salt. With a few changes, many of your traditional recipes can be made healthier without sacrificing the flavor you and your family have come to expect.

You can reduce sugar in a recipe by at least a third without noticeable changes in flavor. Consider cutting any salt in your recipe by half. Look for lower sodium products when buying staples for your meals. Instead of regular milk products, purchase those made with reduced fat. You get to keep the nutritional content but lose some of the calories. If you are invited to a party, offer to bring a healthy choice, such as a black bean, corn and salsa dip to go with baked tortilla chips.

If you are making a family dinner, consider roasting some root vegetables with a light coating of oil and fresh herbs. You don't have to eliminate desserts, but consider using a graham cracker crust for your pies. Try something new and offer fresh fruit as one of the dessert options. Make a trifle using angel food cake, fruit packed in light syrup, and low-fat pudding. It looks very elegant and tastes even better.

The holiday season usually is full of parties. Plan to eat your fill of fresh vegetables. Don't use plates, put your food on a napkin—you will take less. Drink plenty of water, tea or coffee instead of high calorie drinks. You can still have fun without eating so much that you feel uncomfortable.

What about keeping our bodies in shape? The holiday season can put an additional 7 to 10 pounds on many of us. Then we spend the rest of the winter trying to lose the added weight. Plan to get some exercise most days of the week. Before hitting the dessert table, start a new family tradition and take a short walk before eating again.

If your normal workday doesn't leave much time to exercise, at least start parking further from the door. When shopping, stop looking for the spot closest to the entrance. If you are going to a mall try walking the length of the mall to check out the stores and sales before starting your shopping.

Consider seasonal activities; sledding with the kids, cross country or downhill skiing and even strapping on a pair of skates. In the same way you search for the perfect present to give a loved one, search for ways to make sure you get some exercise every day. Remember, the more you exercise, the more food you can enjoy.

Finally, consider keeping your budget healthy. Before you shop, identify who you need to buy presents for, determine how much you have available to spend and what you want to buy. It has been a tough year

financially for families and retailers, so look for sales. Some stores advertise that they will match or beat a competitor's price so be sure to ask.

Watch your wallet and your purse. Some people consider it their "job" to steal from you. Don't flash your credit cards or your cash—you can become a target. If you carry a handbag, consider using one with a strap that goes across your body, not one that can be easily slipped off your shoulder. When shopping, bring along only the cards you plan to use.

Keep track of your spending. It's easy to slide a credit card through a machine, but the bills will arrive in January—make sure you aren't surprised. Protect your credit card number. Don't lend your card to anyone, and don't sign a blank credit card slip.

If your cards are lost, notify the card issuer immediately. Follow up any phone call with a letter to the issuer with the details.

I recommend that you make copies of the front and back of your cards to store at home in a safe place. This way you can find phone and account numbers quickly if you need them.

Finally keep good records. Save your receipts so you can compare them with your bill when your statement comes. If there is a problem, contact the company immediately.

There you have it. Small changes on how you can eat healthy food, incorporate exercise into your busy life and spend your money responsibly. The holiday season can be stressful for many people. With a little extra planning and preparation you can master the season, not let it overwhelm you.