

3Qs: How to eat healthy around the holidays

November 23 2011



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(Medical Xpress) -- Overeating is common this time of year, between the large holiday feasts and more and more sweets creeping into the kitchen. With Thanksgiving only a few days away, we asked nutrition expert Katherine Tucker, chair of the Department of Health Sciences in the Bouvé College of Health Sciences, to offer her tips to eat healthy and avoid overindulging.

What are some easy-to-follow tips to avoid overindulging?

During the holidays, food seems to be available everywhere, so people have a tendency to go overboard and enjoy the foods that are only available during these festive times of year.

Ultimately, everyone needs to indulge a little; the main thing is to be mindful of what you are consuming. Portion control is key. By all means have some of your favorite foods, but savor each bite and limit the amount. Before eating an attractive food, be sure to focus carefully on the first bite, and decide if it is really as good as it looked. If not, stop eating it! Avoid high calorie fillers like bread and make sure that there are several good- quality lower calorie foods at each meal to choose from, including seasonal fruits and vegetables. This can be done in special ways too, by preparing unusual dishes, such as pomegranate spinach salad, winter squash with herbs or a special Brussels sprouts recipe. When possible and acceptable, modify recipes to limit added fat, sugar and refined grains.

How does overindulging on rare occasions have a negative impact on your overall health?

Indulging occasionally is fine, but the problem with the holiday season is that we tend to start with candy at Halloween and continue with special meals and parties through New Years Day. It is common for many people to gain weight during this time. If not kept in check, this can add to serious weight gain over the years. With mindful eating, this can be avoided, while still enjoying food during the holidays.

Aside from altering food choices, what other ways can

people stay healthy around the holidays?

In addition to watching what you eat over the holidays, another contributor to weight gain is lack of physical activity. Rather than (or in addition to) sitting and watching football, get the family together to go out and play touch football, or go for a long group walk. Exercise helps boost your metabolism, so that more calories are burned and directed toward building lean mass rather than deposited as fat.

Provided by Northeastern University

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