

Happy, feel-good holiday seasons start with healthy choices at Thanksgiving, nutrition experts say

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While most people only gain about a pound of weight during the holiday season, that pound may never come off, increasing the likelihood of becoming overweight or obese and the risk of related health problems, according to a National Institutes of Health study. University of Missouri dietitians recommend families maintain healthy diet and exercise habits during the holiday season beginning with Thanksgiving.

Donna Mehrle, registered dietitian and extension associate in the Department of Nutrition and [Exercise Physiology](#), reminds people to consider how they feel when they eat healthy foods and are physically active, so they're more likely to continue those behaviors when holiday stress and [cold weather](#) offer convenient excuses. Feeling better is a great motivator, she says.

"People can continue their healthy habits by being aware of their [food choices](#) at the Thanksgiving table and identifying time commitments that may interrupt their regular exercise schedules," Mehrle said. "Choosing different ways to socialize can be a great strategy. Playing a game of flag football or participating in a 5K race as a family, rather than having another big dinner or TV marathon, are enjoyable ways to incorporate physical activity on Thanksgiving Day."

Cindy Deblauw, registered dietitian and extension associate in the Department of Nutrition and Exercise Physiology, offers tips for healthy

Thanksgiving-themed celebrations in schools. Parents and teachers can help children develop [healthy habits](#) by providing them with opportunities to make good choices, she says.

"At classroom parties, try moving the focus away from food by planning fun activities such as pumpkin painting or a Thanksgiving play," Deblauw said. "It is usually activities, not food, that make parties memorable for children. When food is served, be sure [healthy choices](#) such as [fruits and vegetables](#) are provided and limit the amount of high-sugar and high-fat foods."

MU nutrition experts offer additional tips for a healthier Thanksgiving:

- Eat healthily throughout the day and have a small, high-protein snack such as an apple with peanut butter, a hardboiled egg or yogurt, so you're not overly hungry when you arrive for dinner.
- Make simple swaps such as whole-wheat bread rather than white, brown or wild rice rather than white, or a yogurt parfait instead of another piece of pie.
- Enjoy some of your favorite seasonal treats, but use a small plate to control portion sizes.

If you do overindulge, try to maintain perspective. One day of overeating won't make you gain weight, so plan to get back on track with healthy eating and regular exercise the next day. For more tips on healthy and inexpensive holiday celebrations, visit

<http://www.missourifamilies.org/features/nutritionarticles/holidays.htm>.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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