

See the Light

Holiday feasts don't have to be heavy and rich. Switch up some of your favorite foods with healthier versions—and still enjoy all the flavor

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Rich, decadent meals are hallmarks of the holidays. But Bonnie Taub-Dix, RD, nutrition expert and author of *Read It Before You Eat It*, says this season you can make your festive feasts both nutritious *and* delicious. She shares her favorite healthy-holiday food swaps.

Start with vibrant holiday colors. “It’s a little corny, but I always think of the colors of the holidays. For Hanukkah, I’ll make desserts using frozen blueberries and yogurt for the blue and white. For Christmas, there are so many beautiful red and green fruits and vegetables. You can make a salad with chopped kale and beets, or use red pepper slices or pimientos to perk up a dish—they don’t fade when cooked, and they are a powerhouse of nutrients.” Color signals a food’s phytochemical content—those naturally occurring compounds in plant foods linked with a host of disease-fighting benefits. When you eat a spectrum of colors, your dishes look attractive while giving you a variety of super-nutrients.

Cut carbs with added vegetables. Starchy foods such as potatoes and pasta are satisfying, but large portions make a meal calorie-dense. Taub-Dix recommends lightening up starchy mains and sides with extra non-starchy vegetables, which are lower in calories. “You can use zucchini ribbons either instead of pasta or mixed with linguine—top it with Bolognese [sauce] for a green and red Christmas dish. You can also mash cauliflower in with potatoes, or make a roasted root vegetable medley with Brussels sprouts, sweet potatoes, purple potatoes, and different colors of cauliflower.”

Add oil at the end. Oils and fats add a lot of flavor to food, but too much can turn a dish into a calorie bomb. Taub-Dix’s solution is to add oil at the end, so you can clearly taste it. “At 2,000 calories a cup, a little bit goes a long way.” She uses this trick when roasting vegetables, and lightens



up salad dressings and sauces with flavorful balsamic glazes and horseradish sauces, plus just a drizzle of flavored oil.

Be baking savvy. What are the holidays without desserts? Try a few swaps to make a dish healthier. “For a quick bread, you can use mashed avocado in a 1-to-1 ratio in place of oil—I love it in brownies or banana bread and you don’t even taste the difference,” Taub-Dix says. “The healthy fat in avocados can benefit your heart and also gives you fiber and many vitamins and minerals.” If you want to drive down calories even further, she recommends subbing applesauce or puréed prunes for some of the fat. You can boost fiber and nutrition in baked goods by using whole wheat pastry flour in place of white flour, which Taub-Dix says you can usually swap cup for cup. When a recipe calls for heavy cream, try 2% evaporated milk. “It’s a wonderful alternative to heavy cream—it makes a great pumpkin pie and still tastes decadent without being overly rich.”



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