

Tips for Grilling Out Guilt-Free

The 4th of July is the perfect excuse to fire up the grill. However, for anyone wanting to shed pounds in the summer, barbeques and picnics can provide a predicament.

According to OSF HealthCare nutritionists, you don't have to let food-centered gatherings get the best of your healthy living goals. The solution is really no different than any other time of year. It comes down to a little planning.

For instance, now is the time to take advantage of the local, fresh vegetables at roadside stands and farmers markets. They make a great grilling alternative to the steaks, burgers and brats. You can even add fruit to the fire.

"It enhances the flavor," says Erin Hanley, Lead Clinical Dietician at OSF HealthCare Saint Elizabeth Medical Center in Ottawa. "So, that's something people don't think about. And fruit, taking advantage of the fruit in the season, is just a wonderful way to have something sweet at the end of the meal without going for the ice cream or, you know, things like that people tend to do in the summer."

Another tip to not overdoing it at the backyard gathering is to have a small snack at home before you go, so you're less hungry.

You can also prepare a more healthful dish to bring to the cookout.

"As long as it's okay with the host or hostess, see if you can bring something healthy," says Hanley. "If you know it's just going to be stuff loaded with calories, as long as it's not going to offend anybody, bring something like a nice big salad, or something you feel comfortable eating that is not totally blowing your calories for the week."

The biggest splash you can make is not diving into the sugary drinks. Soft drink consumption increases dramatically in the summer. And diet drinks are not the answer.

"Whether it's true that diet soda keeps as much weight on as sugar, I'm not sure," says Hanley. "But it does keep you craving that sweet taste, that's not a good thing. Just the same as those flavored, sweetened waters. You want to drink regular water as much as you can - or fruit-infused water, if you need a little flavor."

If you are looking for the perfect dish to bring to a barbecue or pack for your picnic, OSF HealthCare has dozens of recipes available at osfhealthcare.org/recipes. These delicious and healthy meal choices for you and your family have all been created and analyzed by OSF HealthCare dietitians.