

Script – Print - Sensible Holiday Eating

COVID-19 will change the look of this year’s gatherings

The holiday season is the time of year filled with family, festivities and plenty of fantastic food. While this year’s celebration will look different due to COVID-19, a holiday spread remains an important part of any scaled-down gathering. But it’s not the only thing that matters.

Medical experts are preaching safety this Christmas season. They recommend families forgo large gatherings this year, instead celebrating in-person only with those who live in your household. Company parties are on hold – virtual gatherings are the in-thing this year.

“I think this is a great opportunity for us to actually spend time with the ones we live with and love the most,” said Adam Schafer, registered dietitian, OSF HealthCare. “The goal is to enjoy that time. When we’re with a large group of people, we’re focused on talking to everyone. This is a time of year where you can really get to know the people you spend the most time with and enjoy that time rather than focusing on the eating.”

Before preparing that scaled-down dinner, Schafer recommends giving your cooking space a good cleaning before you get started. Follow typical cooking protocol – wipe down counters and utensils, wash your fruits and vegetables and wash your hands before, during and after preparing meats, poultry and fish.

While you may still prepare a turkey, side dishes such as vegetables or salad, and tasty desserts, portion size will be key this year. Appetizers, for example, may not be needed for a family gathering of five or less people.

“Ideally, we should make less because we don’t want so many leftovers that we’re forcing ourselves to get it down before it goes bad, and this is a time to cook a meal together,” said Adam Schafer, registered dietitian, OSF HealthCare. “Usually when you’re hosting a meal you’re usually stressed to make sure everything is done on time. This is the time where you can actually enjoy cooking and really focus on some of the things you enjoy, but you don’t need large amounts of it. Portions will be a really different this time around.”

If you’re going to overindulge in too many helpings or an extra slice of pie, Schafer offers a few tips to avoid that post-meal malaise feeling.

“You definitely want to get some activity in,” said Adam Schafer, registered dietitian, OSF HealthCare. “It doesn’t have to be anything crazy, just a 5-10 minute walk to burn off some of the calories you just ate. Then come up with a plan for the next couple of days. Try not to beat yourself up over the holidays as far as much you ate. Instead, focus on how can I make this healthier next time?”

Other recommendations include:

- Eat until you’re 80 percent full
- Drink plenty of water
- Use smaller plates
- Avoid calorie-laden dips

- Don't stuff your refrigerator with too many leftovers

Schafer says set up the food in the kitchen so you're not tempted to graze while you enjoy conversation in the living or dining room. After all, this is a time where fellowship trumps food – this year more than ever.

“Make it about the family,” said Adam Schafer, Registered Dietitian, OSF HealthCare. “This is an opportunity in life where we're almost forced to stay together. We need to make this as enjoyable as possible. Come up with holiday games rather than focus on food intake and being stuck at home. Have fun in the house and enjoy that time you have with your family.”

For more information on holiday eating, visit [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).