

Tidbits, Tips, and Treasures — December 2011

Simple Choices for Making Holiday Parties Healthier

Holidays are typically a time for gathering with friends and family. And gatherings usually involve food. While we might bemoan the abundance of holiday sweets and the seemingly constant availability of holiday snacks at this time of year, there are several easy things we can do to make holiday parties healthier without detracting from the festivities.

Tip: Be intentional about when you serve the food. We often assume that food needs to be present throughout a party. But then we eat “just because it’s there” and not because we’re hungry. Choose when you will bring the food out, and when you will put it away. Here are some ideas:

- **Provide something else for people to hold.** Many people do feel more comfortable with something in their hands. If you’d like to have something available as people gather, consider a **festive beverage** – perhaps some fruit juice warmed with a bit of cinnamon – see Tidbit below for more ideas.
- **Put food away.** When the focus of the gathering shifts to games, or singing, put the food away.
- **Choose high-nutrient appetizers.** That way, if people fill up on appetizers, they will have filled up on quality substance! (What a shame to fill up on empty calories and then not enjoy foods that truly nourish us.)

Tidbit: Be intentional about the nutritional quality of what you serve. It’s okay to enjoy “special occasion foods” – especially if you make the choice to improve the nutritional quality of what you serve.

- **Reduce fat and hidden sugars; dips are a good place to start.** For suggestions of healthier easy to make dips, see pages 42, 47, 49, 79, and 149 of **Simple Choices for Healthier Eating**.
- **Pair sweets with high-protein and high-fiber foods** to help slow down the absorption of sugar. For more ideas on integrating whole grains into your baking, see pages 174-194 of **Simple Choices for Healthier Eating**. For ideas on natural sweeteners, see pages 196, 198-206, and 209.
- **Fruit.** Dried (plain or mixed with nuts); frozen (warmed to top ice cream, yogurt or cake); fresh (cut up or served whole)... fruit makes a colorful, nutritious addition to your table.
- **Reduce the salt.** Snack foods often are high in sodium. Look for **lower-sodium** options and ingredients.
- **Fiber.** Fruits or veggies with the skin on and whole grain breads or crackers are great examples. Fiber helps us to feel full and thus curbs the urge to eat “constantly.”

Treasure: Enjoy in moderation. Don’t stress about indulging in some fun treats ... just do so moderately so that your body and mind can continue to enjoy the holidays. Some things to consider:

- **Portion size.** Small servings allow guests to enjoy a variety of foods without excessive eating.
- **Choose beverages wisely.** Fruit juice is a fun festive drink because it is colorful and can be mixed with many things. Choose 100% juice and then dilute it with sparkling water. Use small-sized cups to limit the quantity served. Drink water first to quench your thirst, and then enjoy the special drinks.
- **Vary what you eat (and drink).** Enjoy the sweet treat. But have some protein and other nutrients, too.

Check this out! The meatballs and dip featured this month incorporate many of the suggestions above:

- ✓ Our **Honey-Garlic Glazed Meatballs** contain whole grain oats (fiber), contain quality nutrients, use ingredients lower in sodium, sugar and fat and are easy to make in small sizes.
- ✓ Our **Dill Dip** uses ingredients lower in sodium, fat & sugar and is a quality appetizer when paired with veggies!