



Adapting Holiday Recipes for Healthier Celebrations

Transforming traditional dishes for
better nutrition

Wednesday, November 5, 2025

6:15 PM

Cranbury Women's Group

Cranbury Public Library

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On behalf of Penn
Medicine/Princeton Health
Community Wellness



Holiday Cooking Agenda

- Understand the need for healthier holiday recipes
- Strategies for Healthier Ingredient Substitutions
- Adapting classic holiday Dishes
- Tips for maintaining Flavor and tradition



Understanding the Need for Healthier Holiday Recipes

Common Health Challenges During the Holidays

Unhealthy Eating Habits

Holiday eating often includes high-calorie, sugary foods high in saturated fat, causing weight gain and possibly contributing to cholesterol, blood sugar, and blood pressure issues.

Blood Sugar and Digestion

Excessively sugary foods can cause blood sugar spikes

Stress and Routine Disruption

Holiday stress and disrupted daily routines may impact exercise patterns and eating routines.





Substitutions

Instead of:	Try this:
•1 cup cooking oil	•½ cup unsweetened apple sauce plus ½ cup oil
•1 cup butter, shortening or lard	•1 cup margarine •¾ cup vegetable oil •1 cup fruit puree such as unsweetened applesauce
•1 whole egg	•2 egg whites •¼ cup applesauce •¼ cup yogurt
•1 cup cream cheese	•1 cup low-fat or nonfat plain Greek yogurt
•1 cup sour cream	•1 cup low-fat or nonfat plain yogurt (regular or Greek) •1 cup low-fat sour cream
•1 cup light cream	•1 cup evaporated skim milk •1 cup fat-free half & half
•1 cup sugar	•⅔ cup sugar
•¼ cup maple syrup	•¼ cup pureed fruit
•2 cups all-purpose flour	•1 cup all-purpose flour plus 1 cup whole-wheat flour
•1 cup all-purpose flour	•1 cup whole-wheat pastry flour

The Impact of Traditional Holiday Foods on Wellness

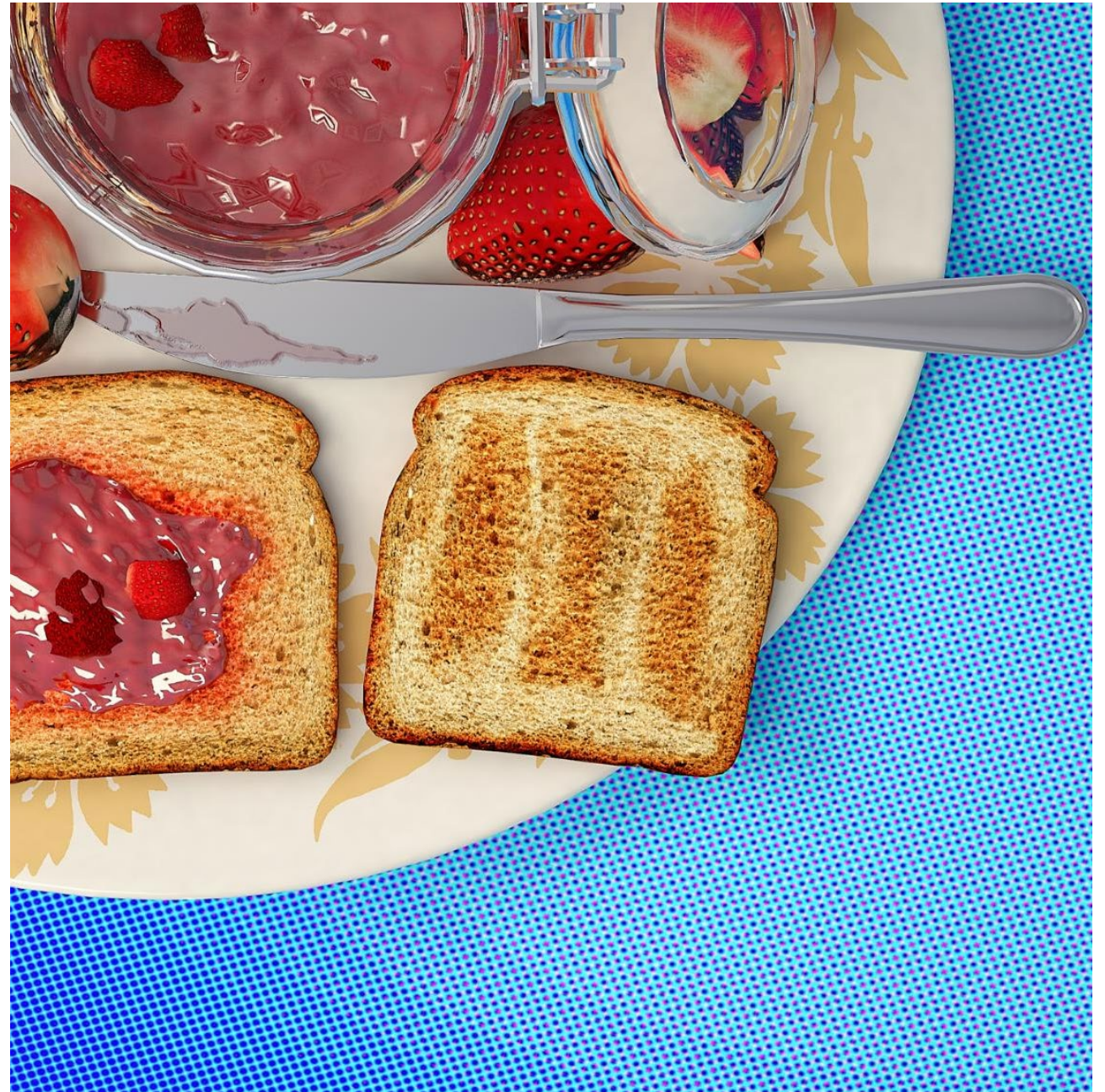
Saturated Fat's Effect on Health

Excess saturated fat in holiday dishes can negatively impact heart health and contribute to increased blood cholesterol levels.

Foods that contain saturated fat include:

- Butter
- Cream
- Half and half
- Whole and 2% milk
- Cheese
- Bacon
- Sausage
- Eggs
- Beef
- Pork
- Lamb
- Coconut oil and coconut milk

Saturated fat is associated with all the chronic diseases. The daily goal for saturated fat is less than 20 g/day. Reading labels is important





Benefits of Recipe Adaptation

Can Reduce Calorie Density

Using whole foods may lower calorie density, making dishes better for weight management.

Can Enhance Nutrient Content

Recipe adaptation can boost vitamins and minerals, improving overall nutritional value of meals.

Can Support Digestion and Energy

Healthier recipes promote better digestion and sustained energy levels for active lifestyles.



High Sodium Holiday Foods

- Prepared soup
- Prepared gravy
- Prepared salad dressings
- Seasoning packages
- Bouillon
- Ham
- Salami
- Cheese
- Salted nuts
- Bacon
- Chips
- Pretzels
- Crackers
- Breads



Strategies for Healthier Ingredient Substitutions

Make Your Own Salad Dressing

[Salad Dressing Recipe](#)



Make Your Own Stuffing



- [Low Sodium Stuffing](#)



Added Sugar

Natural Sweetener Options

Look for ways to use naturally sweet foods that provide additional nutrients like raisins, dried cranberries, dried cherries, blueberries, bananas, etc.

Use orange juice, applesauce, prunes, etc. to replace some of the refined sugar.

Cut back where you can.



Low Sodium Gravy

Low Sodium Gravy



Choosing Whole Grains over Processed Options

Benefits of Whole Grains

Whole grains increase fiber intake which aids digestion and supports overall gut health.

Replacing Refined Grains

Substitute refined grains like white flour with whole wheat, oats, barley, buckwheat, quinoa, or brown rice for healthier meals. Partial substitutions are also helpful.

Sustained Energy

Whole grains promote sustained energy release. They often impart a “nuttier” flavor to dishes.

Cut it out! Try using 1/4th the amount of sugar a recipe calls for. If the recipe calls for 4 tablespoons of sugar, use 3 tablespoons instead.

Naturally sweet! Try replacing sugar with natural liquid sweeteners such as honey, agave, or maple syrup. Honey, agave, and maple syrup are sweeter than refined sugar, so you will want to use the ratio below when replacing sugar with any of these sweeteners. For every cup of sugar, use 1/3 or 1/2 cup honey, agave, or maple syrup instead.

Honey, agave, and maple syrup contain liquid, so you want to make sure to reduce the amount of liquid in your recipe by about 25%.

To counter the acidity of these three sweeteners, try adding 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon baking soda for every cup of sweetener that is used.

Since honey, agave, and maple syrup caramelize faster than sugar, make sure to reduce the heat on your stovetop or oven (by about 25 °F).

Puree Away! Try adding pureed fruits such as raisins, dates, bananas, or yams for a bit of natural sweetness. Using purees can also help you cut down on fat in your baking too.

From The University of Maine





Incorporating Healthy Fats and Oils

Replace Saturated Fats

Swap butter and lard for healthier fats like olive oil and avocado oil to improve overall health. Walnut oil and canola oil are also good options for Omega-3 fats

Use Nut Butters

Incorporate natural nut butters as a source of essential fatty acids beneficial for brain and heart health.

Benefits of Essential Fatty Acids

Healthy fats provide essential fatty acids that support heart and brain function.



This is a great substitution for butter

Use the original version for baking

Includes:

Vitamin A – 20%

Vitamin D – 20%

Omega 3 fats



Adapting Classic Holiday Dishes



Healthier Versions of Desserts and Baked Goods

Nuts and Spices for Flavor

Add nuts and spices to enhance flavor and texture without adding excess sodium

These also provide beneficial phytochemicals that can enhance health.

They are low in calories.



Nutritious Alternatives for Side Dishes

Roasted Vegetables

Roasted vegetables are a nutritious alternative to creamed or fried sides. They are rich in vitamins and minerals.

Lightly Dressed Salads

Salads with light dressings provide many nutrients such as vitamin K, vitamin C, folate, and fiber



Creating Lighter Main Courses

Lean Protein Selection

Opt for lean proteins like chicken, fish, or plant-based options to reduce calories and saturated fat.

Minimize Heavy Sauces

Reduce or replace heavy sauces with lighter alternatives to maintain flavor without excess richness. Reduce cream and butter in sauces

Use Fresh Herbs and Citrus

Incorporate fresh herbs and citrus zest or juice to brighten flavors and add freshness.



Tips for Maintaining
Flavor and Tradition



Using Herbs and Spices for Taste Enhancement

Flavor Enhancement

Herbs and spices add depth and complexity to dishes, enhancing taste without extra salt or sugar.

Examples of Herbs and Spices

Common flavor enhancers include cinnamon, nutmeg, rosemary, and garlic.



Preserve Traditional Methods

Respecting cultural cooking methods maintains authenticity while preparing meals.



Mindful Ingredient Choices

Choosing healthier ingredients supports well-being without compromising flavor.



Support Enjoyment and Health

Balancing health with cultural authenticity enhances enjoyment and nutrition.

Presentation and Enjoyment of Adapted Recipes

Enhancing Holiday Experience

Sharing meals with loved ones creates a warm and memorable holiday atmosphere that enriches the dining experience.

Aesthetic Appeal of Food

Beautiful presentation makes healthy dishes more appealing and encourages mindful eating during special occasions.

Creating Convivial Atmosphere

A convivial atmosphere during meals enhances enjoyment and fosters connections among diners, making healthy eating memorable.





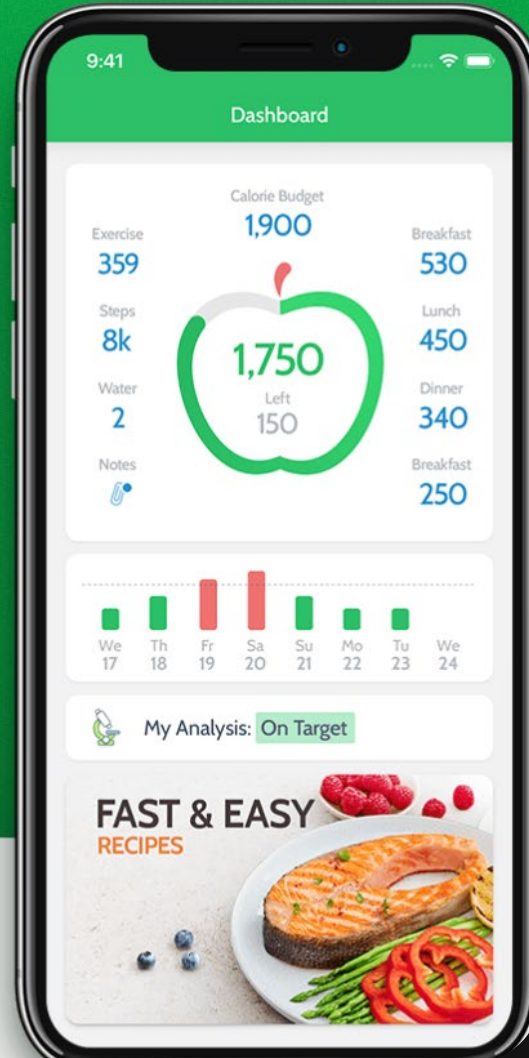
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SALAD

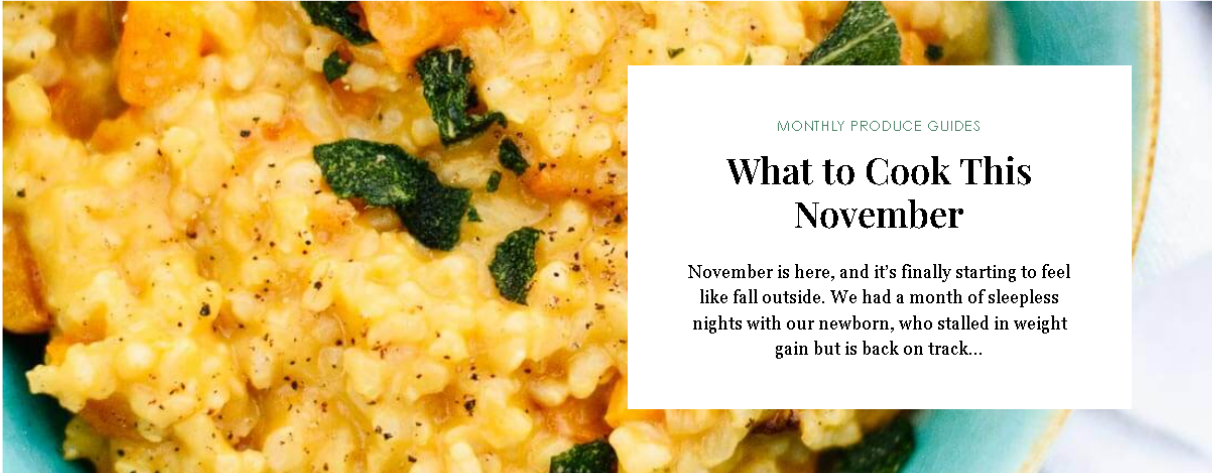
SOUP

DINNER

DESSERT

FAVORITES

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MONTHLY PRODUCE GUIDES

What to Cook This November

November is here, and it's finally starting to feel like fall outside. We had a month of sleepless nights with our newborn, who stalled in weight gain but is back on track...

Your Suggestions?





Conclusion

Promoting Wellness

Healthier holiday recipes support overall wellness while allowing joyful celebrations with family and friends.

Thoughtful Substitutions

Making thoughtful ingredient substitutions helps maintain traditional flavors while enhancing nutrition.

Honoring Tradition

Honoring holiday traditions enriches celebrations and connects us with cultural heritage.



Conclusion and
Questions

Thank you for
attending today
Happy Holidays!!