



From the lead-up to Halloween till the calm after New Year's Day, we're in a splendid season of holidays and gatherings of families and friends. Whether the centerpiece of the day is a traditional family meal, a bag stuffed full of treats or tasty morsels on a tray, food often plays a big role in our celebrations.

It's been said that we are what we eat. There is real truth in that familiar dictum. If children had ingredient labels, with ingredients listed in order like they are on a box of brownie mix, the number 3 ingredient for the average American child would be soda. The very first ingredient would be refined-flour treats such as cookies, donuts and, yes, brownies.*



The holiday season can be an inviting time for sugary drinks and white flour treats. So how do we have memorable, delicious holidays and still give our children the best? And as families, how do we pack in the fun and festivity without packing on the pounds?

I've got a few suggestions:

- 1. Plan some splurge days.** Perhaps choose an average of one day a week, or about 10 splurge days during the holiday season. This is far better than having 60 or 70 splurge days! Celebrating occasionally with non-everyday food is fine — we just don't want it to go on for weeks or months at a time. Get plenty of ordinary good food days in between.
- 2. Watch what they drink.** Especially keep an eye out for empty-calorie, sugary drinks. These can slide in the calories without filling kids up. Creative smoothies make tasty treats, incorporating organic milk or soymilk, fresh fruit or perhaps some holiday spices — without too much added sugar.
- 3. Work in the whole grains.** Whether it's crackers, stuffing or dinner rolls, look for opportunities to replace refined white flour with whole grain goodness.
- 4. Invite fruit to the party.** If a child will be eating caramel anyway, consider a caramel apple. This packs in more nutrients, has extra fiber to blunt blood-sugar spikes, and helps fill kids up with real food. The same goes for chocolate-covered strawberries.
- 5. Start filling up early.** A healthy breakfast is an important meal all year long but to me it is most important during the holiday season. It can help prevent cravings later in the day so your family can enjoy the treats you choose, not the treats you can't resist. A glass of water or organic milk before the party can make this strategy even more effective.



6. Take time to enjoy the treats. By waiting 30 seconds from the start of one bite to the next, you can pay attention to and enjoy each delicious bite, feel more satisfied sooner and, again, help blunt blood-sugar spikes. This may take a bit of practice for your family but it can make holiday eating more rewarding.

7. Make activity part of your holiday. Look for opportunities to walk, dance, toss a football or play active games. If you go caroling, the kids won't even notice it's a walk.

Keep in mind throughout the holiday season that not only do celebrations lead to food, festive food also leads to celebration, and the connections form powerful links. Understanding this can help you notice which holiday foods you want to become special to your family for years, and even generations, to come.