Ways to Lighten Your Holiday Meal

By Katie Ferraro, MPH, RD, CDE

Cookie swaps, catered lunches, buffet tables brimming with treats: We celebrate the holidays by sharing food. Don’t let the season be a reason to overdo it, though. Follow these 10 tips to keep the season bright—and light:

1. **Fill up first.** Have a healthy snack before hitting the holiday party scene. You make wiser choices when you’re not famished.

2. **Go easy at the get-go.** Holiday appetizers are calorie minefields. Select one delectable starter and then stick to shrimp, vegetables and fruit before the main course.

3. **Bring your own.** Stressing about what to eat at a holiday gathering? Volunteer to bring your own healthy dish that can double as a host or hostess gift.

4. **Consider cauliflower.** Cauliflower can stretch the starchiest of dishes. When planning an appetizer, look for cauliflower mashed potatoes, pizza and torte crusts, and even cookie recipes online.

5. **Swap and save.** Substitute low-fat yogurt, milk, cream cheese, mayonnaise, chicken stock and eggnog for high-fat recipe ingredients.

6. **Get a gravy separator.** Make your gravy lean and mean. Use a gravy separator to separate juices from fat, saving calories while concentrating flavor.

7. **Do winter fruit desserts.** There’s no need for high-fat desserts when winter fruits are in season. Oranges, kiwis and persimmons are a great finale for healthy holiday meals.

8. **Mingle more and linger less.** Make the rounds at holiday meals, try not to hang around the buffet table, and limit second helpings to the healthiest fruit and vegetable dishes.

9. **Put your fork down.** It’s a time-tested trick—if you put your fork down between every bite, you’ll eat less and savor more.

10. **Sip smartly.** Avoid calorie-laden soft drinks, punches and/or mixers in alcoholic beverages, and take in large glasses of water between drinks.