

Day of indulgence made less so

With planning, Thanksgiving dinner can avoid being be a caloric nightmare

By KELLY BOTHUM
The News Journal

Surviving the onslaught of holiday eating with your waistline intact means avoiding some caloric land mines. But it's hard to tread lightly when so many of our favorite comfort foods – baked with love, lard and family memories – come our way:

There's Granny's stuffing, the kind made with white bread and sausage and baked right in the bird. There's your cousin's macaroni and cheese, gooey and thick from the cream and four kinds of cheese. And the green bean casserole, drowning in cream of mushroom sauce and topped with crispy fried onions.

But wait! There's more. The star of the day – the golden bird, its skin baked to a honey glow from its butter bath – awaits its coronation on your plate.

Even registered dietitian Michell Fullmer laughs in disbelief when sharing the calorie load of a traditional Thanksgiving meal: 2,000 to 3,000 calories, depending on how you fix those beloved favorites. "And that doesn't include leftovers," said Fullmer, spokeswoman for the Delaware Dietetic Association.

When it comes to our holiday meals, we're more meat and (mashed) potatoes than soup and salad. Personal chef Lisa Brisch said that while most of her clients are interested in eating healthy, they're not thinking about how to slim down their holiday menus.

"When they hire me for cooking, it's usually going to be parents, grandparents, cousins coming over," said Brisch, owner of Dinner Thyme, in Middletown. "So to say we're eating low-fat for Thanksgiving might annoy your guests."

But Thanksgiving and the holidays that follow don't have to be belt-loosen-

ing, all-you-can-eat food fests. By thinking ahead and making some smart substitutions, you can still savor those tasty traditions. And preparing most of your food yourself – rather than buying pre-made or processed foods – lets you control the amount of salt, fat and sugar that goes in, Brisch said.

Just don't try to deprive yourself. "If you love it and it's a social thing, then plan for it. Don't just abandon your usual diet because it's a holiday," said Susan Burke March, a registered dietitian from Daytona Beach, Fla., and author of "Making Weight Control Second Nature: Living Thin Naturally."

"Make this a conscious decision. If you're going to have extra calories, make them work for you."

See MEAL — D5

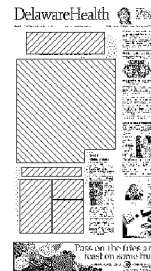
With Thanksgiving just over a week away, here are five tips for filling your plate mindfully:

1. Eat breakfast.

Don't make the big meal of the day the only one, Fullmer said. If you starve yourself all day, when it's time to dig in for dinner, your plate may look like a feed trough.

Be sure to eat a healthy breakfast – now might not be the time for an egg-bacon extravaganza – and depending on when dinner is served, perhaps a snack or small lunch.

If your holiday meals tend to be carb-heavy feasts, consider adding some extra servings of fruits and vegetables during those earlier meals. The extra fiber can help you feel full



longer.

When hitting the appetizer trail, think about fruits and vegetable rather than cheese or crackers.

2. Think about portions.

Even on the holidays, portion control remains one of the best ways to keep your eating habits on track. That means forsaking the giant serving of sweet potato casserole in favor of a dollop, especially if you've got other high-calorie goodies on your plate.

If you're the one fixing the family meal, one easy trick is to offer food in smaller quantities, said Marianne Carter, a registered dietitian and director of the Delaware Center for Health Promotion. It's a matter of simple math – smaller servings equal fewer calories.

In the buffet line, sample the holiday specialties but skip the foods that are always available, said Kathleen Splane, program leader with the Kent County Cooperative Extension. If you skip the buttered roll, you may not feel so bad about the scoop of stuffing.

"I think you should enjoy what you're eating," said personal chef Betty Burleigh, who cooks with whole-wheat flour and uses non-fat sour cream as small ways to cut the fat and improve the nutritional quality of the foods she prepares. "You can eat what you want if you can control how much you eat."

3. Put the brakes on seconds.

The turkey was moist, the mashed potatoes divine and you lapped up the last bit of gravy with a warm biscuit. So is it time for a sequel?

Probably not, advises Splane. "We are rarely eating because we are physically hungry at the holidays," she said. "We eat because we love the foods that are symbolically connected to gathering with friends and family."

Instead of immediately gorging on a second helping, get away from your plate, even just for a few minutes. Chances are,

when you come back you'll realize you aren't that hungry.

If you have seconds, at least choose smart. Use a smaller plate, if possible, have some veggies, and skip the gravy with the turkey.

4. Don't drink your calories.

For many families, a cup of cheer is as much a part of the holiday as your aunt wearing that reindeer sweater. But it's important to remember that those liquid calories can add up. Mulled wine, made with wine, honey and spices, usually has about 125 calories for an eight-ounce glass. But a glass of Tom and Jerry, an eggnog-type drink made with eggs, milk and sugar, can have as many as 400 calories.

"Not only does it contain lots of calories, but alcohol stimulates the appetite, which is the last thing you need as you approach the dinner table," Carter said.

But skipping the booze doesn't mean loading up on the sherbet punch. Depending on how it's made, each cup can be 75 to 100 calories. A better choice is water. Add a spritz of lemon or lime and it has the bonus of making you feel full, too.

5. Beware the leftovers.

Maybe you made it through the holiday meal without eating off every plate of food passed your way. But there's another temptation to overcome – leftovers. "Sometimes it's not the meal, but the five days of eating afterward," Fullmer said.

Don't let leftovers in your refrigerator change your eating habits, she said. Send the rest of the pumpkin pie home with a relative or stick it in the freezer for another special occasion.

If a bit of stuffing is a must-have with your day-after Thanksgiving turkey sandwich, consider making it open-face instead of using two pieces of bread. Or opt for a thin spread of avocado instead of

mayonnaise to add a boost of healthy, monounsaturated fats.

One way to limit your load of leftovers is to get half a turkey or just a turkey breast. Brisch said merchants who sell fresh turkeys sometimes offer half-birds as well. For a small gathering at her house last year, she bought half of a bone-in turkey breast and a turkey leg.

"It was more than enough for us and some leftovers," she said.

Limiting your leftovers also can help you get back in the swing of healthy eating before the next holiday. And it reminds you that what you're celebrating is the occasion, not the food.

"Enjoy your holiday meal. It's OK to indulge," Carter said. "Just resume your normal eating habits the next day."

Contact Kelly Bothum at 324-2962 or kbothum@delawareonline.com.

Green bean casserole:

If you follow the soup-can recipes, look for a low-sodium variety and don't go so heavy on the fried onions.

Sweet potato casserole:

If possible, bake your sweet potatoes instead of using the canned variety, which usually come in syrup.

Pie: If you have to have a slice of one, go for pumpkin over apple or pecan to save about 300 calories.

Stuffing:

Changing Grandma's stuffing may be heresy, but consider adding an extra cup of veggies and using your own spices rather than buying seasoned breadcrumbs to reduce your salt intake.

Gravy:

Lighten up on the drippings in favor of more broth when making from scratch.

Turkey:

Rather than baste with oil or butter, consider orange juice for a flavor twist.



Macaroni and cheese:

Cut the saturated fat by using low-fat cheese. Substitute buttermilk for the cream.



Collard greens:

Rather than cooking these leafy veggies with ham hocks, consider smoked turkey.



Mashed potatoes:

Evaporated skim milk can give your potatoes a richer – but low-fat – taste than whole milk. Mash in some cauliflower or turnips for a vitamin boost.

Alcohol: Try to alternate a glass of water with each alcoholic beverage.





Lisa Brisch, personal chef and owner of Dinner Thyme in Middletown, says people don't often think about ways to slim down a holiday meal: "When [clients] hire me for cooking, it's usually going to be parents, grandparents, cousins coming over. So to say we're eating low-fat for Thanksgiving might annoy your guests."

The News Journal
ROBERT CRAIG