SALEM REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER

Tips for Healthy Holiday Eating

(SALEM, OHIO) – November 19, 2021 – From Thanksgiving dinner to sweet Christmas treats, it can be easy to overindulge during the holidays. With a little moderation and planning, however, it's possible to savor the foods of the season without adding on extra pounds.

"This time of year is filled with celebrations and get-togethers, many of which center around food and drink," said Julia Meissner, MS, RDN, LD at Salem Regional Medical Center. "Healthy eating around the holidays can be challenging. But, with some simple strategies, you can still enjoy the festivities while maintaining your health goals."

Julia Meissner, MS, RDN, LD at Salem Regional Medical Center.

Meissner offers these suggestions for healthy holiday eating:

- **Don't Skip Meals:**
  Fasting or skipping meals to 'save' calories for a big dinner can lead to overeating. Before going to a holiday event, eat a light meal or healthy snack so you aren't starving when you arrive. Options that are high in protein and fiber, such as a serving of fruit, string cheese, Greek yogurt or a small handful of nuts, can help curb your appetite and prevent you from overindulging later.

- **Watch Portions:**
  You can still enjoy your favorite holiday foods, but moderation is key. Opt for smaller portion sizes or use a smaller plate to help reduce the amount of food you eat.

- **Eat Healthy Foods First:**
  When you sit down for your meal, start by eating the healthiest foods on your plate and work your way to the less healthy fare. You'll be more likely to fill up on nutritious foods before overeating the higher-calorie options.

- **Take Your Time:**
  Savor your food by taking small bites and chewing slowly.
  Keep in mind that it takes about 20 minutes for your brain to realize you're full. The slower you eat, the more likely you are to feel satisfied and realize you don't need a second helping.

- **Limit Grazing:**
  After your meal, try not to hang out near the buffet table. Socializing away from the food can help you to avoid mindless grazing or snacking throughout the party.

- **Sip Wisely:**
  Make good choices when it comes to what you drink. Holiday beverages like eggnog, sweet wines and cocktails can be high in sugar and calories. Limit yourself to a small glass or stick with lower calorie options, such as water, tea or seltzer.

- **Keep Moving:**
  While it may be tempting to sink into the couch after a large meal, staying active can help make up for eating more than usual. Get a jump start on burning extra calories by going for a short walk after dinner or doing another activity that doesn't involve sitting.

If you end up overindulging despite your best efforts, Meissner says it's important to not beat yourself up over it.

"The holidays are a time for celebration. Be kind to yourself and just do your best to return to healthy habits the next day."