

Celebrate the Season-ing

For many of us, we have entered a season of celebration beginning with Thanksgiving and ending after the first of the New Year. We celebrate with family, friends and co-workers. Food is often at the center of many of our gatherings. We can use these gatherings to expand our palates and explore new foods and celebrate the “seasonings” of a variety of cultures! Here are some tips you can use to celebrate healthier foods and customs.

Cook With Company

Gather up some of your friends who use authentic recipes and ingredient from other regions or countries. Prepare a meal together that includes some our your own family favorites and those of your friends. Sharing the kitchen space together is a great time to visit while sharing the meal preparation methods specific to other regions around the world. If possible, cut back on some of the creams, sauces, or gravies and add more vegetables to the meal. Changing cooking methods is another approach to making the meal a healthier alternative; baking instead of frying.

Blend Cultures

Many of the foods and beverages in America are made as a result of blending cuisines of many cultures. Celebrate our diversity by exploring dishes that include a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, seafood, lean meats, and low-fat dairy.

Spice It Up

The unique combination of spices and herbs used in the food we prepare at home often reflect our own heritage or our favorite ethnic cuisine. Choose alternative seasonings that would add flavor such as chili, basil, curry, cilantro, sage, or caraway. Changing your seasoning choices are a good way to replace the salt and saturated fat in your recipes.

Look for Low Numbers

Read the labels on packaged foods to determine how much sodium they contain. Begin by looking packaging that says “low-sodium” or “not salt added.” Check the nutrition labels and use products that have lower numbers listed for sodium.

Beneficial Beverages

A variety in cultures brings us a variety of tasty beverages with them. Create tasty smoothies using different fruits or spices than you are accustomed to. Reduce the

amount of sugar and fat used in beverages or choose prepared beverages that have less sugar and fat in them. If you are trying to manage calories, drink unsweetened beverages. Water is always another smart choice!

Enjoy Cultural Gatherings

Celebrate your traditions, but explore and engage in the traditions of others, as well. Have fun with traditional games, dances, and sports that get you moving. Balancing what you eat with regular physical activity is important to your overall wellness.

Show the Way

Your children watch everything you do and hear everything you say. They learn from you and that includes the food preparation you use in your home. Spend time in the kitchen with your children creating some of the culturally diverse dishes and seasonings you are experimenting with. Let them taste the different flavors and textures from different regions and countries and talk about the traditions of those areas with them. Create meals that are new to the family, while being conscientious of calories and fat.

Savvy Dining

Dining at restaurants offers us the chance to try new foods that can also lead us to overeat. Choose meals that are low calorie such as salads and stir fries or whole grain pasta with low-fat sauce. Ask your server for an extra plate to split the meal or ask for a take-home container and set half of the meal aside before you begin to eat your meal.

Learn More

MyPlate is a program designed to help Americans make healthier food choices using foods from the various food groups. Refer to the MyPlate website for practical information, tips, tools, and recipes that will help you learn how to make healthier food choices – www.ChooseMyPlate.gov

Seasonings to Celebrate With

Here are a few of the more common herbs and spices associated with regional and international recipes.

Cilantro – Great for Latin American, Indian and Chinese dishes

Cumin – Often used in Mexican, Middle Eastern, and Indian dishes

Basil – Common to Italian dishes as well as some Thai recipes

Parsley – Often included in French and Eastern European recipes

Allspice – Used in a variety of Caribbean and Jamaican dishes

Caraway – Common to some German, Austrian, and Hungarian dishes

Herbs and spices add to the flavors of seasonal celebrations. They can also replace fat and sodium to make our meals more nutritionally sound. You can use them to explore and appreciate the flavors and traditions of other regions or countries as well. (Sources for this article are from www.ChooseMyPlate.gov and the Virginia Cooperative Extension (www.ext.vt.edu) Publication# 348-739.

For more information on using Herbs and Spices in your food preparation at home, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office 785-238-4161 and enjoy the celebrations of the season. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!