

We quickly approach 2018 and with it comes New Year's celebrations and gatherings. Many times, you attend these events where only snacks, not a full meal, are offered. Perhaps you think that the snacks may be a healthier option rather than a heavy meal. Although it is possible for snacks to be a lighter and healthier option, it completely depends on the choices you make.

Admittedly, one of my favorite party snacks is the slow cooker cocktail smoked sausages swimming in sauce. However, I really try to avoid eating more than one or two. Why? If you take a look at the recipe, it's clearly NOT a healthy option.

Ingredient Analysis: The miniature smoked sausages are high in fat (15 g), sodium (530mg), and calories (170 cal) per (5 little sausages) serving. Although they are relatively high in protein (7 gram), but have no other significant nutritional value. Add in your bottled BBQ sauce and you have more sad nutritional news. On the nutrition label of a popular bottled sauce you can buy at our local grocers, it tells us that just 2 tablespoons of sauce contains 70 calories. There are no calories from fat, but the sugar level is very high – 16g which accounts for 64% of your recommended daily intake. The sodium level is marginal at 290mg, which is only 12.1% of your recommended daily intake. When you add the sauce and the sausages together – you can account for over one-third of your recommended sodium intake for the day – with just 5 little smothered sausages! The standard recipe adds one more layer of dismal nutritional value – the grape jelly! One tablespoon of grape jelly contains 50 calories – all of which come from the 11 grams of sugar in a single tablespoon.

So – can you make adjustments to this recipe? Absolutely! Check out this comparison of the smoked sausages alone:

| Nutritional Comparison | Beef Smoked Sausages | Turkey Smoked Sausages |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Calories per 5 link serving | 170 | 80 |
| Calories from fat | 130 (=76% of calories from fat) | 40 (=50% of calories from fat) |
| Total Fat | 15g | 4.5g |
| Total Sodium | 530mg | 480mg |
| Sugars | 1g | 1g |
| Protein | 7g | 8g |

Just making a single ingredient change can make a significant change to the nutritional impact of this recipe.

Eating a half portion (2.5 links) is a great alternative, but an even better one is to avoid the temptation of these little sausages. Instead, consider some of these lower calorie options:

- Baked corn chips and salsa (5 chips with salsa is about 120 calories with 7g of fat and 119mg of sodium)
- Low-fat bean dip and crackers (1/4 cup of low fat bean dip has about 80 calories with 3g of fat and 0mg of sodium)
- Nuts (consider almonds, cashews, or pistachio for their higher protein, lower calorie per serving value)
- Low-fat yogurt and fruit (I like the low-carb, low fat versions of yogurt)
- Fresh fruit (strawberries are an exceptional source of vitamin C, kiwi is another great option!)
- Veggies and low fat dip (using hummus is a great no-cholesterol option or a low fat cream dressing works well, too!)

Here are a couple of dip options that are healthier alternatives to many of the ready made dips we purchase in grocery stores:

Hummus (Chickpea Dip)

Serves 12 (1/4-cup servings)

20 ounces cooked or canned chickpeas, drained
1 tablespoon peanut butter OR 1/3 cup tahini (sesame butter)
1/4 cup lemon juice
1/4 cup water
2–3 cloves garlic
1/2 teaspoon cumin (optional)
1–2 tablespoons oil

Place first 6 ingredients in a blender. Blend until mixture is a smooth paste. While mixture is blending, slowly add oil. Chill. Pour into bowl. Serve with vegetables.

Each serving contains: 100 calories, 7g fat, 0mg cholesterol, 70mg sodium, 9g of total carbohydrates (1g sugar), and 3g protein.

Dilled Low-Fat Yogurt Dressing or Dip

Serves 6 (1/4-cup servings)

1 cup low-fat yogurt
2 tablespoons vinegar
1/2 small onion, finely chopped
1/2 teaspoon dill seeds or dill weed

1/4 teaspoon dry mustard
1/4 teaspoon minced garlic

Mix all ingredients together in a small bowl. Refrigerate for 2 or more hours to let flavors blend. Serve as a dressing on a salad, or serve as a dip with raw vegetables such as cauliflower and broccoli flowerets, celery and carrot sticks, whole snap peas, cucumber and tomato wedges, sliced summer squash, and sweet pepper slices.

Each serving contains: 25 calories, 0.5g fat, 5mg cholesterol, 25mg sodium, 3g of total carbohydrates (3g sugar), and 2g protein.

You don't have to give up flavor or favorites when it comes to snacking. You DO need to make careful choices and limit the portion size – especially with snacks that have little nutritional value but contain high levels of calories. The key is moderation. Making healthy choices most of the time helps ensure a longer healthier life.

For more information on healthy snacking, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!