

Daily Union Article

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“Feasting and Fasting – Finding Balance”

With Thanksgiving just around the corner, many people are making their last minute menu decisions and deciding what they want to include in the meal.

The traditional American Thanksgiving meal includes such menu items as turkey, stuffing, sweet potatoes (yams), green bean casserole, corn, cranberry sauce, and yes, often pumpkin pies!

The challenge with our holiday feasts is certainly NOT keeping things tasty and filling. On the contrary, the challenge is in finding the balance in what we consume and our activity level to offset the high calorie content these favorites offer. The other challenge is in making sure we adjust our recipes and menu selections to offer our family “lighter” options that still pack a punch of traditional flavor.

For those who are trying to enjoy these tasty menu options without sacrificing the balance they so carefully try to follow the rest of the year, here are some tasty tips and alternatives that just might help you enjoy feasting on Thanksgiving without fasting in the days to follow after.

Let’s talk turkey. There is no need to worry too much about finding balance with this menu item. Turkey offers a low-fat high protein option to many lean red meats. A skinless turkey breast has 8% more protein than the same size serving of boneless skinless chicken breast or trimmed top loin beefsteak. It is low in saturated fat and total fat. Additionally, it is naturally low in sodium. A 3-ounce serving of turkey ranges 120-140 calories and has 8g of protein.

Like turkey, sweet potatoes alone are a great healthy food option. The best way to maintain their nutritional value is to bake them. This will intensify their sweetness and make them more satisfying to the palate without needing to add too many toppings. Simply wash the potato under running water and set them aside to air dry. Preheat the oven to 425°F. Line a baking sheet with aluminum foil (sweet potatoes can get a bit juicy when baking in the oven), prick the potatoes from all directions several times with a fork, and place on the baking sheet. Pricking the potatoes will reduce the baking time and prevents them from bursting in the hot oven. Bake until tender – about 45 – 60 minutes. Remove from the oven when you can pierce the thickest part of the potato with a fork and it comes out clean. Using a pair of tongs to hold on to the potatoes with one hand, slice each down the center. Put a small pat of butter in the center and, if desired, sprinkle with a touch of cinnamon. You can also use a dash of salt and pepper to taste.

Green bean casserole used to be my favorite part of my dad's Thanksgiving meal spread. Over the years, though, I seem to have lost my taste for it. I can't say the same for the rest of my family so it is still on the table every Thanksgiving! However, I adjust the traditional recipe so that it is lower in fat and sodium. I use the reduced fat version of cream of mushroom soup. Instead of the high fat fried onions on top, I sprinkle sliced almonds (about ¼ c.) on top about half way through the baking so that they don't get too dark. The almonds still give the crunchy texture without adding the fat and salt found in canned fried onions. These adjustments reduce the calories per serving by over 50 calories.

Corn is another staple at the Thanksgiving table. There are those who would say that corn is too high in carbohydrates to be considered a "healthy" vegetable. Although high in overall carbohydrates, fresh corn offers a good source of fiber (2g per serving) and protein (3g). One ear of corn provides 10% of the daily recommended amount of fiber. The challenge with corn is what you add to it at the table. Too much butter and salt will offset the nutritional value of corn. As with any food, we need to moderate what we add to it for seasonings or flavor enhancers.

Although it doesn't suit my palate, many feel that a Thanksgiving feast isn't complete without cranberry sauce! Canned cranberry sauce has 210 calories per 1/2c serving and has 54g in carbohydrates, no protein, and 1g of fiber. Even with those numbers in mind, the USDA Food Fact Sheet for Canned Cranberry Sauce states that 1 serving of this food product counts as 1 serving of fruit. You can find recipes that have a lower calorie content per serving but they don't give you a clear idea of what a serving size is so that may skew the numbers a bit.

And finally, the traditional favorite in many American households – Pumpkin Pie! This might just be where you will want to splurge, but there are some tasty alternatives to the traditional pumpkin pie recipe. In one popular recipe book, I found the classic pumpkin pie recipe to have 350 calories per serving while the "skinny" version has 250 calories per serving. The recipes are similar with the main difference being in what type of evaporated milk to use and the ingredients for the crust are altered, as well.

Regardless of your decisions about what to make and how it is made, moderation is the key at ANY meal. Keeping yourself in balance will help you enjoy both the meal and the company you are with more. Enjoy the feast in a way that doesn't lead you to fasting afterwards! Until next time, keep living resourcefully!