

THANKSGIVING

Pilgrims probably didn't need to diet, so for them Thanksgiving was a deserved chance for an all out feast. Today, with more people conscious of their weight, feasts can still be enjoyed without fear of packing on unwanted pounds. The trick, according to Weight Watchers, is to reduce the fat and calories in favorite Thanksgiving recipes and to be sensible about planning and serving delicious meals.

"Preparing a healthy Thanksgiving Meal may be a contemporary idea but there are many traditional ways of cooking that are inherently low in fat and calories, such as using spices, homemade stocks, and selecting from a variety of delicious seasonal vegetables," said Maria Walls, Senior Nutritionist at Weight Watchers International.

"Feasting is actually healthier and more enjoyable when spread out over the course of the day beginning with a healthy breakfast," Walls said.

Walls offers these tips:

- Don't starve before the feast. Starving yourself for a big dinner can backfire because it can result in over-eating. Instead, eat a mini meal such as a cup of non-fat yogurt, half a small bagel with jam, and a piece of fruit to avoid feeling hungry. This will stop you from overeating at the family gathering at dinner.
- Heavy up on vegetable dishes. Who says vegetables have to be a side dish instead of a main part of the meal? Seasonal offerings including squash, zucchini and succotash are terrific sources of vitamins and minerals and generally low in calories. So when planning the dinner menu, pick a few savory recipes, such as Mashed Sweet Potatoes (see attached), and add a couple of delicious fresh veggie recipes to the meal. Quick tip: steam vegetables in a very small amount of water, to help preserve nutrients and don't add the vegetables until the water is already boiling so cooking time is shorter.
- Cut the fat. Remove the skin of the turkey before eating to cut the fat. Select breast meat over legs or thighs because it's the leanest.
- Lighten up gravies and sauces. Make them fresh rather than using canned. Homemade stock as the basis for a soup, gravies or sauce can add flavor without the hidden sodium you may get from a can. Use the bones from a roast combined with fresh vegetables to create a lite but potent flavor booster. Quick tips: In the days leading up to your feast, stockpile vegetable peelings and trimmings, along with chicken or beef bones, in sealable plastic bags and freeze them until you have the time to make your stock. To help drain the fat, line a colander with a paper towel and strain the stock through the colander; refrigerate the stock until the fat rises to the surface and scrape off and discard the fat.
- Get active. Play football instead of just watching. In between appetizers and the main course or after dinner prior to dessert, indulge in a quick family game of touch football or take a brisk stroll outside to enjoy the crisp clear air. Activity not only helps burn calories but will also avoid additional calories by eliminating idle eating.