

FOCUS ON THE STARS THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

By Clara Wicoff



Without question, one of my favorite parts of the holiday season is the food. Some of my favorites include pumpkin pie, sweet potato casserole, mashed potatoes, and, of course, dinner rolls! Food is an important part of every culture, and it plays an essential role in many of our holiday celebrations and traditions.

While these celebrations are to be encouraged, it is also worth noting that Americans usually gain one to three pounds (or more) during the holiday season. This may seem insignificant, but this excess weight can add up over the years and contribute to chronic health conditions. Furthermore, poor dietary quality is the leading risk factor for cardiovascular disease (or heart disease) which is the leading cause of death in Kansas.



So, how can we continue to enjoy our favorite holiday meals while also prioritizing our health? We can start by focusing on the "star" ingredients: the fruits and vegetables. This is a topic I recently presented on at the Chanute Public Library. Attendees

learned about how many of our favorite holiday dishes actually start with a healthy ingredient, whether it's the pumpkin in a pumpkin pie or the green beans in a green bean casserole. When we focus on these star ingredients and make simple changes to reduce the amounts of fats, sugar, and salt usually found in holiday recipes, it becomes possible to enjoy our favorite holiday meals while simultaneously working to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

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For example, let's consider one popular Thanksgiving dessert:

pumpkin pie. To focus on the star ingredient of pumpkin, you can use fat-free evaporated milk instead of regular evaporated milk in the pumpkin pie filling to reduce fat. If you want to focus even more on the star ingredient, you can consider going without the crust (which is a quick and easy way to remove fat and calories from any pie). However, you can also consider tasty crust alternatives (like a gingersnap cookie crust) if having a crust is important to your family!

By focusing on the stars, you can continue to enjoy your favorite holiday dishes with loved ones while also putting health on the menu this holiday season. For more information on holiday recipes, please contact Clara Wicoff, Nutrition, Food and Health Extension Agent, at clarawicoff@ksu.edu or by calling 620-365-2242.