

Welcome again to Who's Cooking Today? and Bon appetit!

Chances are that when you pick up this paper, you will be well ahead on your plans for a scrumptious Thanksgiving meal. One thing is clear, with Osceola County as a destination for so many folks from all over the world, it is certain that not two families celebrate Thanksgiving Day in the same way or with the same types of food. For most, the turkey is the most obvious item at the table, although chicken is gaining in popularity. Regardless of what you have on your table during the celebration, give thanks. Give thanks to The One that has made the celebration possible.

On our part, Mary Beth and Marie, we have a word of advise for you. Whatever food you decide to have for the celebration, eat in moderation. Some readers may not have a say in what will be served, but can surely exercise moderation in the quantities consumed. Just remember how you felt after you consumed last year's Thanksgiving meal. People often, eat until they feel full or until it hurts. If that is your case, you are eating beyond capacity. It takes approximately 20 minutes for your brain to tell your stomach that food is on the way. Eat slowly and remember to stop when you start to feel full. The leftovers will be available for another meal; don't feel you have to consume all of the food at one sitting.

If you are cooking for a crowd, or just for a few, remember that some substituting may curb unwanted food cholesterol and calories in the form of saturated fat and sugar. In some instances small changes will increase your intake of antioxidants with your fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Not bad, huh?

Some of the most popular substitutions when cooking for a few or a crowd are:

- Use juice or broth to keep the turkey moist and cover during part of the cooking instead of basting with fat
- Use one cup of evaporated skim milk for every cup of cream or whole milk called for in a recipe
- Puree vegetables instead of cream to thicken soups
- Use citrus juice or flavored vinegar instead of oil for marinades
- Add a small amount of olive oil or canola oil, trans- fat free fats instead of stick margarines or butter to vegetables and other foods
- Use non-caloric sweeteners that can be used in cooking.
- Use less marshmallows or brown sugar for your sweet potatoes. Both add empty calories and can easily be cut back or out of recipes.

For the much awaited desserts, substitute these:

- Reduce the amount of sugar by using non-caloric sugar substitutes of your choice and add more spices. Adding cinnamon tends to increase the sweetness of foods.
- Use one-quarter cup applesauce and one quarter cup canola oil for every half-cup butter or margarine in cookies and cakes.
- Two egg whites or a quarter cup liquid egg substitute for every egg called for in the recipe to cut down on fat.
- Use low fat or non-fat condensed milk instead of regular condensed milk to reduce calories and fat. Try evaporated skim milk instead of evaporated milk in recipes.
- Phyllo crust (use cooking spray between the layers) or graham cracker crust instead of a traditional pastry piecrust. Or use a one-crust pie instead of two-crust pie and serve half portions.
- Slice fresh or puree fruit, top with a dab of light whipped cream, or lightly dust powdered sugar on cakes instead of frosting.

As you see, a little here and a little there, can make a difference. Your waist will definitely know.

Ah! Do not forget the colorful vegetable salad with a nice light calorie dressing. Serve the dressing on the side and you will be amazed at how little it takes to add flavor but not the calories. Use broth instead of butter or margarine to moisten the stuffing. By the way, a good recommendation is to make the stuffing and to serve it separately in a pan. Not stuffing the bird allows the bird to cook well internally and the dressing will not get the fat drippings. And talking about drippings, when making the gravy, forgo the animal dripping and substitute for a healthier fat like canola or olive oil. Chilling the drippings will make easier to separate the fat. The drinks, plenty of iced water and lime, a seltzer water with your choice of

juice or maybe a diet non-cola drink with juice on the rocks. A punch bowl is in order to show off your concoctions. Watch as your guests enjoy these out- of- the- ordinary drinks. Tip: serve in small cups.

As a bonus, keep the dessert part for later in the gathering. Some of us like to try different desserts. It may be a good idea to portion them in small servings. A restaurant in Orlando serves the desserts in sizes a little larger than test tubes. They look very cute and to tell the truth, many people enjoy having small bites of all the desserts. Wanting to be creative?, a combination of fruits for a luscious fruit salad can be a hit on your parade of desserts. You can count on it! (P.S. try the recipe for sweet potato custard, you will like it!)

And to balance things out, prepare another area to direct your guests away from the table (food). Have activities for them to do that will not involve food. Who knows, someone may want to take a short low paced walk. And while all this is happening, recruit the safety conscious group to store away the leftovers.

Thinking of food safety, if you are celebrating with a turkey, it may be thawed in the refrigerator with a pan under it to collect any juices. This method will take an estimated 24 hours for each four to five pounds of turkey. Another method is to submerge the turkey in the sink in cold water. This method requires about thirty minutes for each pound of turkey. The water must be changed every thirty minutes to reduce the bacteria count in and on the bird. It is not safe to defrost turkey or any meat on the counter. For safety sake, use a cooking thermometer when preparing your dinner; do not rely on the pop out found in the turkey. When cooking the turkey the oven should be set at 325 degrees. The meaty part of the thigh should have a reading of 180 degrees. If you are stuffing your turkey anyway, the internal stuffing must reach 165 degrees to prevent food borne illnesses.

Remember, to count your blessings! Whatever food may be on your table, whatever way you choose to prepare it, give thanks and enjoy!

For more information about nutrition, recipes and celebrating the holidays safely check these sites: www.mypyramid.gov, www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines, www.5aday.com, www.deliciousdecisions.org, www.fightbac.org, <http://lancaster.unl.edu/food>, mpholine.fsis@usda.gov, University of Florida/IFAS Extension 321-697-3000 (Osceola), <http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu>, Food Safety Hotline 1-800-288-8372 (available during specific hours during the actual holiday), 1-888-Safefood, 1-800-535-4555, Hearing Impaired: 1-800-256-7072.

For free sessions on meal planning for weight management, diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure call (407) 343-2082 or (407) 343-2076. These sessions are given in English and Spanish as part of the education component of the Closing the Gap Program. Cooking for Wellness with Mary Beth Salisbury and Marie LoPresti are offered monthly at the University of Florida/IFAS Extension facilities in Osceola Heritage Park. Closing the Gap is an Osceola County Health Department's diabetes education and prevention program. Most sessions meet in the Osceola County Health Department in Kissimmee. All programs are open to everyone without regard to race, color, sex, age, disability or national origin.

Recipe:

Sweet Potato Custard

One cup mashed cooked sweet potato
Half cup mashed banana (about two small)
One cup undiluted evaporated skim milk
Two tablespoons packed brown sugar
Two beaten egg yolks (or one-third cup egg substitute)

Half-teaspoon salt

As needed- non stick cooking spray

One-quarter cup raisins

One-tablespoon sugar

One-teaspoon ground cinnamon

Instructions:

In a medium bowl, stir together sweet potato and banana. Add milk, blending well. Add brown sugar, egg yolks, and salt, mixing thoroughly. Spray a one-quart casserole with non-stick cooking spray. Transfer sweet potato mixture to casserole dish. Combine raisins, sugar, and cinnamon; sprinkle over top of sweet potato mixture. Bake in a preheated 325-degree oven for forty to forty five minutes or until fork inserted near center comes out clean. Cool well.

Garnish with light whipped topping. Yields six- half cup servings. Happy Thanksgiving!