

Healthy Habits for Handling the Holidays

By: Bethany Elliott, BS, dietetic intern and Emily Jarvis, BS, dietetic intern; Edited by: Kaylyn Crosier, MS, RD, LD



During the holidays, it seems like everyone is having a party, and while it can be fun, it can also be difficult to stay on track with a healthy diet. Often, we are drawn to those special holiday foods that we only get to eat during this time of year, and, sometimes, we eat way too much! It can be challenging to try to maintain eating healthy while attending parties or holiday dinners constantly. So, I'm sure you've asked yourself the question, "how can I continue my healthy diet while enjoying the holidays?" Well, I'll tell you!

Step 1: Have a plan! If you're planning on going to a party where everyone is bringing a food item, choose a healthy food/snack to bring that you can eat. With a little alteration, you can make popular holiday recipes much healthier. Also, a vegetable tray with hummus for dipping is a great option. Bringing your own healthy dish ensures you know there will be something nutritious to eat!

Step 2: Allow yourself to enjoy the food! Just because you're eating healthy doesn't mean you can't ever enjoy dessert or special foods you might not normally eat. Just don't overdo it! Remember, moderation is key!

Step 3: Keep being active! It may take a little more planning, but don't let your exercise routine suffer just because it's the holidays.

Step 4: Know yourself. If you know you tend to overeat at holiday parties, eat a filling snack before you go to the party to keep your hunger cravings in check and you'll be less likely to overeat.



White Chocolate Holiday Bark

Ingredients:

- 1 cup sliced almonds
- ¼ cup unsweetened coconut
- 1 cup oven-toasted rice cereal
- 1 cup dried cranberries
- 1 ½ pounds good-quality white chocolate, chopped
- 2 teaspoons vegetable oil

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 325°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside.
2. Spread the sliced almonds and the unsweetened coconut in an even layer on the baking sheet. Toast for 5 to 8 minutes or until coconut just begins to brown. Remove baking sheet from oven and let cool.
3. In a large bowl, combine almonds, coconut, rice cereal, and dried cranberries. Reserve about ¼ cup of the mixture and set aside.
4. Place chopped white chocolate and 2 teaspoons of vegetable oil in a large heatproof bowl and set over a medium saucepan of simmering water. Stir with a spatula until the chocolate is completely melted.

5. Remove the chocolate from the heat and fold it into the almond mixture. Spread the mixture evenly on the parchment-lined baking sheet. Sprinkle on the reserved ¼ cup topping. Refrigerate for 30 minutes or until the chocolate has completely set. Break the bark into small pieces and serve.

This would be a great recipe to make and take to a holiday party, as it makes 30 servings. Though the chocolate and almonds do contribute some fat, the coconut, rice cereal, and cranberries make this recipe a healthier option than traditional holiday bark. You could also add some peppermint flavoring to make this taste like peppermint bark!



May your holiday season be a happy and healthy one!

Bethany and Emily are both currently dietetic interns at Marshall University and plan to become Registered Dietitians. As one of the nation's food and nutrition experts, they are committed to improving the health of her community. To find a registered dietitian in your area, visit www.eatright.org and click on "Find a Registered Dietitian."