

Celebrating a HEALTHY holiday season is as easy as 12345!

The holidays are a time for celebrating with family and friends, shopping trips and enjoying sweet treats and the ever-important holiday meal. With so much to do (and eat) and little time to relax, it's not uncommon that many families find themselves out of balance – energy balance that is.

Maintaining balance during the holidays doesn't have to be an added stress or challenge. When you eat and drink (energy in) to provide the right amount of fuel your body needs for growth and everyday living (energy out), you achieve energy balance.

Remember these five simple, daily steps and your family will be on its way to healthy holiday fun!

1 Engage in at least one hour of physical activity – Indulging in a few pieces of candy or grandma's famous chocolate chip cookies can be balanced with some active time. Go outside and build a snowman, shovel snow as a family or go caroling through your neighborhood. If you're holiday shopping at the mall, take a few extra laps around the perimeter before heading to your car. Hosting an indoor holiday gathering? Turn on some music and invite your guests to dance the night away.

2 Spend two hours or less in front of the TV or computer screen – With so many low and no cost options for holiday family fun, it's not hard to limit the amount of time your family (children and adults alike) spends in front of a screen. Instead of watching your favorite holiday carols on television, read the stories together as a family. Take a stroll through your neighborhood and enjoy the decorations. Prefer spending time indoors? Build a fort with pillows and blankets, or make paper snowflake cutouts and decorate your windows. Turn off the TV and enjoy some quality family time!

3 Eat three balanced meals – Start every day off right with a healthy breakfast; think protein and whole grains to keep you going strong all morning. Try hot oatmeal with almonds, fresh berries and cinnamon on top.

If you'll be enjoying a meal at the home of a friend or family member, offer to bring a salad or vegetable for a healthy alternative. Hosting company? Make healthy foods as easy (or easier!) to access as the foods high in sugar and fat. Try placing healthy foods in front or at the ends of the table, and in convenient snacking areas.

Whether you're organizing the party or just an attendee, help curb overeating by choosing smaller plates to facilitate smaller portions.

4 Drink four or more cups of water or low/no-calorie beverages – Drink calories count; stick to water and other low or no calorie beverages to stay hydrated all day, particularly as the weather turns colder and the air becomes drier. For some holiday fun, add a splash of cranberry juice or even fresh berries to water. Freeze fresh berries or mint leaves in ice cubes for some zest.

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Enjoy five or more servings of fruits and veggies – Holiday treats don't always have to be of the calorie-laden variety. Fruit kabobs, vegetables with dip, and whole grain crackers with a variety of healthy toppings are popular and healthy crowd pleasers.

If your family isn't a huge fan of vegetables, try reducing the calorie intake of some of your favorite holiday dishes by "sneaking" in vegetables. Finely diced spinach is easy to hide in lasagna, pizza, and spaghetti (try this in your meatballs too!). Finely diced carrots are a good addition to chili, which also works well with a vegetable juice. Pureed cauliflower works well in white-sauce based casseroles.

Instead of the traditional American approach to building your meal around the meat entrée (a portion size that is often out of sync with our needs), fill half of your plate with fruits and vegetables, a quarter of your plate with whole grains, and the other quarter with a lean meat or protein source.

Start this year's holiday season off right! Gather your family together, review each of the five steps for achieving energy balance and create a plan to make this holiday season healthy and fun for everyone.

For more information and additional tips on how to achieve energy balance as a family, please visit www.nrgbalance.org.



The recommendations provided above are from the Penn State Hershey Center for Nutrition & Activity Promotion's health education message: nrgBalance 12345! The guidelines are based on a supplement published in December 2007 by *Pediatrics*. For more information, please visit www.nrgbalance.org.