Opinion: Tips for healthy holiday eating

By Lynn Norton

The holidays and their food celebrations are almost here. Sound wonderful? Many love the holidays, but dread the annual resolution to lose weight. Consider this: if you eat 500 extra calories a day for two months, you could gain nearly 10 pounds.

Limit holiday weight gain with the following tips:

- Be selective. At a party, scan the food choices and select the best first. Skip snack foods available "anytime" like chips, crackers, pretzels, and cheese.
- Fill up, not out. Alternate high calorie treats with low calorie vegetables and beverages.
- Cut down portions. Start with a forkful of cheesecake instead of a slice. Try new or special holiday treats, but savor in small amounts.
- Socialize without a full plate and a high calorie beverage. Snacking adds calories fast. Select a small plate and eat, enjoy, and be done.
- Eat slowly, avoid seconds, and stop after 20 minutes.
- Avoid high calorie drinks like punch, beer, wine, or a cocktail and drink water or diet soda. Can't resist? Consume half the calories; alternate between high and low calorie beverages.
- Entertain healthfully. Be considerate of others watching their weight and serve sugar-free, low-fat food and beverage options. This provides healthy options for you, too.

Healthy substitutions can be tasty and satisfying. Consider some simple substitutions from the American Dietetic Association:

- Use two egg whites instead of one egg
- Replace cream or whipping cream with evaporated skim milk
- Substitute an equal amount of applesauce for at least half the oil, margarine or butter in muffins and quick breads
- For dips, sauces, and pie toppings, use non-fat yogurt and whipped topping or fat-free sour cream and salad dressings
- Top casseroles with almonds, fresh herbs, or raw vegetables instead of fried onion rings
- Choose reduced-fat cheese in recipes

Find healthy recipes online. Helpful sites include the National Heart, Lung & Blood Institute; American Heart Association; American Diabetes Association; Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics; and "Light Favorites" in allrecipes.com.

Dress for success. Skip clothes with an expandable waist. Keep belts comfortably snug to remember your "no weight gain" goal.

Exercise. Plan extra exercise around the holidays. Make walking, snowshoeing or skiing a family tradition. Be active before the feast and enjoy burning calories as much as eating them.

Enjoy the holiday. Don't focus on the food and beverages – enjoy the company of friends, family, and the spirit of the season. Relish treats in moderation.

It's difficult to lose weight around the holidays, but give your health a present and start 2015 without extra pounds to lose. If you succeed, adapt these tips every day. Achieve weight maintenance or weight loss with similar vigilance year round.

Lynn Norton is a registered dietician who provides nutrition services to patients at Barton Health. On Dec. 2 she will give

a free lecture titled Nutrition for the New Year from 6-7pm at Lake Tahoe Community College in the board room.