

Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Steel yourself: 'Tis the season for sweet treats

I don't usually have much of a sweet tooth, but during the holidays I tend to go overboard on cookies and other baked goods at parties and when people bring treats to the office. This year, it seems to have started already. Any ideas to help me keep in control?

Actually, it sounds like you may be a step ahead of most people. According to the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, about 70 percent of U.S. adults and children consume more added sugars than recommended — and not just during the holidays.

The guidelines say to keep added sugars to less than 10 percent of daily calorie intake. That means if your recommended calorie intake is 2,000 calories, your goal should be to keep sweets to a maximum of 200 calories a day.

It's hard to estimate how many homemade gingerbread cookies or slices of pecan pie that might be. But since you can find added sugars in many types of foods and beverages, including salad dressing, yogurt and energy drinks, it's a good idea to do what you can to limit the holiday treats to a reasonable amount — one or two small items a day, at most.

You're probably thinking that, during the holidays, that's easier said than done. But here are some thoughts to keep in mind as the celebrations begin:

- Decide in advance that you'll choose only the treats you will truly, deeply enjoy. Some sweets are definitely worth the indulgence, but, let's face it, others aren't. Give yourself permission not to sample items for fear of insulting the baker (even if it's your supervisor at work or your very best friend), and make up your mind now to pass on the items that aren't your very favorites.



image: iStock

And for those treats that are worthwhile, imagine taking one modest portion from the platter and slowly savoring each bite. Many dietitians recommend this mindful approach to eating not just during the holidays but all year round to reduce the extra, empty calories we often mindlessly consume.

- Find ways to cut back on other added sugars in your diet this time of year. Sugar-sweetened soda, fruit drinks, coffee and other beverages account for nearly half the added sugars that Americans typically consume. Opting for ice water, sparkling water, or plain coffee or tea instead of high-sugar drinks most of the time can go a long way to allowing you to feel just fine about indulging in an iced butter cookie or slice of pumpkin roll. And beverages are just one aspect of the diet to consider. If you normally have cereal with added sugars or toast with jelly for breakfast, for example, choose unsweetened alternatives during this time of year.
- At holiday gatherings, position yourself so the goodies aren't in your line of vision. Remember the old joke about the "see-food" diet? It's true — visual cues are often hard to ignore. But you can make this work for you, too. Keep a fruit bowl on your kitchen counter to make it easy to grab an apple before you leave for a party. Filling up on fruits and vegetables always makes it easier to blithely decline an extra treat.

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Editor: This column was reviewed by Irene Hatsu, state specialist in food security for Ohio State University Extension.

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