

Katie Johnson: Good morning, and welcome to Apple A Day Lake Region Health Care's health and wellness show where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I am Katie Johnson, your host, and my guest today is Madison Mashek. She is a clinical dietitian at Lake Region Health Care in our Nutrition Services Department, and she's here to talk with us about holiday food. Good morning, Madison.

Madison Mashek: Good morning.

Katie Johnson: So the holidays are a time for fun and festivities, and like I said, food. Usually a lot of food between the gatherings we have at work and the parties that we're invited to or hosting, not to mention the celebrations we have with our families. We can be overwhelmed maybe with the variety of indulgences that are available to us, and that maybe aren't so good for our waistline. So we wanted to talk today about maintaining some healthy eating habits throughout the holidays. We're in this home stretch of, at least in our office, boxes upon boxes of candies coming to the office combined with, like I said, all of those parties and gatherings. As we think about the holiday season, what do you see as the common challenges that the holidays pose to our personal health and routines and regimens?

Madison Mashek: Yeah. I think one of the main challenges when it comes to holidays is really just having a balance with our health. For most of us, holidays are a busy time of year, there are a lot of events going on from concerts to parties and potlucks, along with maybe even traveling near and far to spend time with family and friends. Many times our health can get put on the back burner. Maybe we get less sleep or we forget to drink enough water, or we're eating more than normal or even skipping meals because we're busy shopping and running errands, or we aren't as active, especially here in the Midwest when it gets cold.

I think it's important to have a plan in place, or at least be conscious of it so that you're able to make the right choice when it comes to your health.

Katie Johnson: Yeah, you bring up a lot of good points that all just kind of collide together during this month and make it difficult. Let's break down the various areas of holiday consumption to address maybe a variety of different concerns that our listeners might have.

First one is alcohol, a common theme around the holidays. What are some holiday tips for people who'd like to maybe still partake in a holiday beverage or two, but also want to be conscious of their health?

Madison Mashek: Yeah, I actually have a couple tips for this. One thing that I like to do that helps cut back a little bit is to alternate water between alcoholic beverages. If you order a cocktail or beer if you're out, just automatically ask for a water also, or even just asking for a water in between your drink. Not only are you hydrating yourself by having that water, but filling up so you're less likely to have more

alcohol later on because your stomach is fuller, and then it can also help to cut back on calories as the calories in the alcohol can add up quickly and they're empty, they don't provide any nutrients. Then also to help avoid that hangover the next day as you're full of water and you're hydrated.

Katie Johnson: Really good points.

Madison Mashek: Yeah. Then another way to cut back on those empty calories from the alcohol and mixers is to mix your drink with water. Instead of having a mixed drink with sugary juice or pop, use water or club soda, seltzer, any of those work. They don't have calories. There are so many different flavors of sparkling water nowadays on the market. Also, vodka, club soda, and a lime slice is one of my favorites, fairly low calorie. The main point is that if you want to enjoy a drink at a holiday party, it's okay, just do so in moderation and with your health in mind.

Katie Johnson: And nowadays there are so many fun mocktail recipes out there that that's certainly an option too. You don't have to have the calories of the alcohol or just be stuck with a plain old glass of ice water, there's some good alternatives.

Madison Mashek: Yes, definitely. Pinterest is one of my favorites for finding all of those.

Katie Johnson: Awesome. Second, sweets. My big downfall at the holidays, those desserts and treats and candy. This temptation is really intense at this time of the year. What are some ways that we can cut down on that temptation?

Madison Mashek: First is the three bite rule. The first bite is the best, the last the grand finale, and every bite in between is the same. So in three bites, you get the full dessert experience. So only taking enough to have three bites and really savoring them.

Katie Johnson: I'm gonna have to try that. I'm not ... I'm not convinced all of them in the middle are the same, but I'm gonna test that.

Madison Mashek: Another thing you can do if you like more than one dessert is just take a small enough serving to have one bite of each. This trick can even apply to other holiday foods. Say you like almost every dish at the table, but there's no way to fit it all on your plate, let alone in your stomach. Just take enough to have one or two bites of everything you like so you're still able to enjoy all of your favorite holiday foods but not overdo it.

Then there are also plenty of recipes out there for healthy alternatives to seasonal desserts that you can bring with to share so that you have a healthier option. The Food Network website is a great resource for this.

Katie Johnson: Super ideas. You mentioned this a little bit, quantities. How can we watch our weight during the holidays when there are so many above average treats and dishes to choose from?

Madison Mashek: Right. First off, don't skip meals. This is one of the biggest causes of over eating. Skipping a meal results in hunger, which can cause an increase in a hormone called cortisol in our body. This can lead to cravings for fatty, salty, and sugary foods. Instead of saving up for the big meal, eat breakfast and nibble on healthy snacks like raw fruits, veggies, and nuts throughout the day to avoid over eating later on.

Also, another one is eat what you love, leave what you like. Instead of piling your plate a mile high with things that you don't really care for, pick only the foods that give you true enjoyment. With that, it is okay to say no to a food or second helpings. Just because it is holiday food does not mean we have to eat it. I'm sure we all know an aunt or a grandma that pushes food on to you and wants you to try it, but come up with a simple phrase that won't offend them, like, "Thanks. That is so thoughtful of you, but I'm already full. Do you mind if I try some later or take a little bit home to try?" After all, it is your body and ultimately you have a choice what you put in it.

Katie Johnson: That's a really good point. It may be hard for some of us, but good to practice those different phrases. How about for those of us that are hosting parties? Any suggestions for throwing a party that keeps in mind some healthy options for our guests while still being a delicious and fun spread?

Madison Mashek: Yeah. One way to keep it healthier is to include vegetables. Veggies are a great way to include a lot more volume in a dish to make you feel like you're eating more than you actually are. They're full of water, fiber, and nutrients and can taste good when prepared the right way. Now I'm a dietitian, but probably not the one you want to go for when it comes to cooking advice. But if you're looking for some healthier recipes, the Food Network website has a ton of good ones that I mentioned earlier before for the healthier dessert. Mashed cauliflower instead of mashed potatoes is one of my favorites.

Katie Johnson: Yum.

Madison Mashek: Another thing to keep in mind is food allergies. If you know who is coming to your party ahead of time, you can ask them any food allergies or intolerances so that you can prepare a dish that is safe for them to have.

Katie Johnson: Yeah, good idea. You mentioned Pinterest too. I'm guilty of wasting away some time looking at Pinterest. But, the thing that I like about the vegetable recipes I see there are, especially at Christmas, the bright colors allow you to make some really festive, fun looking things for a party that are actually really healthy.

Madison Mashek: Yes, yes, definitely.

Katie Johnson: Sticking to a plan through the holidays is more than just food choices. How about some other ways to stay on top of our health during the holidays? Any tips or tricks for our listeners there?

Madison Mashek: Yeah. Making sure you get plenty of sleep is important. The average adult needs between seven and nine hours every night. Staying hydrated is also good. Drinking eight eight-ounce glasses a day or half your body weight in ounces are two common goals. Physical activity is also something that many of us lack around the holidays. So many parties and get togethers revolve around food and traditional holiday food and treats, but should also include some sort of activity. Many people think that it needs to be something extreme and strenuous, but something as simple as bundling up for a 15-minute group walk after Christmas dinner will do.

Lastly, the one that most people don't think of is to relax. With all the hustle and bustle of shopping and cooking and baking and traveling and planning and preparing, we often forget to take care of ourselves. It's okay to take a day for yourself and just relax because our mental health is just as important as our physical health.

Katie Johnson: That's a really good point. Even maybe with relax, just being present. Don't get so caught up in the preparation and the perception to forget to enjoy the season. Those are all great tips, Madison. Anything else you want for top takeaways when it comes to our holiday eats and treats?

Madison Mashek: I think the most important thing to remember when it comes to the holidays and trying to be healthy is to just do your best. Everybody is human, nobody's perfect. Prioritize what matters most to you, take time to enjoy yourself with your friends and family. Even little victories are still victories. You don't need to beat yourself up if you fall off track. Tomorrow is a great day to start over.

Katie Johnson: Okay. I'm gonna tell myself that about all the extra cookies I ate right before bed last night. That was yesterday. Today is a new day and I'm not gonna be too hard on myself over that. Madison, thank you so much for great advice for watching our calories, being present, being active, and just maintaining some healthy habits and lifestyles during the busy holiday season.

Madison Mashek, clinical dietitian from Nutrition Services is my guest today on Apple A Day. Madison and Katie both reminding you there is so much to do here, stay healthy for it. Have a great day.