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### Pair heart-healthy, anti-oxidant-rich foods with holiday fare, experts advise

There are eight nights of Hanukkah and 12 days, liberally speaking, of Christmas. But the holiday season starts weeks earlier, with Thanksgiving, and extends into January.

That's a long time to feast.

Too much imbibing and bingeing, for an extended period of time, can damage one's health.

The solution is to enjoy traditional high-fat, high-sugar holiday foods in moderation, while substituting nutrient- and antioxidant-packed foods whenever possible now and throughout the year, according to health experts.

The highest incidence of heart attack occurs during the holidays, according to Palm Beacher Dr. Chauncey Crandall, a cardiovascular surgeon.

"The reason for that is we are eating high fatty foods, we are drinking a lot and there's a lot of stress over the holidays, so we need to be aware of that and make adjustments to stay in good health," Crandall said. "I think all the holiday foods are reasonable, but we need to eat smaller amounts and control our portions."

The heart doctor recommends adding oatmeal, blueberries, salmon, olive oil, beans and peas and nuts — particularly almonds — to the diet to lower levels of artery-clogging cholesterol.

"Try to focus on good nutritious foods, higher portions of vegetables and fruits, and lean protein," Crandall said. Eat smaller servings of gravy, potatoes, red meat, butter and other foods high in fat and/or sugar, he said.

Hillary Wright, a senior nutritionist with Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, said some traditional holiday ingredients are healthful — including walnuts, pumpkin, apples and cranberries.

"Nuts have gotten a bad rap because if you eat a lot of them they are high in calories. But nuts are also loaded with lots of natural antioxidants, healthy fats and dietary fiber. And so when used conservatively, offer lots of positive nutrition to the diet throughout the year," Wright said from Boston. She said an ounce of nuts averages 160 to 200 calories. "But if you aim for half an ounce of nuts and pair it with a colorful fruit, you can trim the calories and add some healthful phytonutrients," Wright said. Phytonutrients are essential nutrients that come from plants.

The Dana-Farber nutritionist said these types of foods can play a role in reducing one's risk of cancer. In addition to enjoying pumpkin in various recipes, Wright suggests consuming sweet potatoes, carrots and butternut and acorn squash. These vegetables are available year-round and can be roasted, grilled or chopped and served cold in salads, she said.

"The bright color in pumpkin and other orange-pigmented vegetables indicates a strong presence of antioxidants and other phytonutrients that appear to be part of a cancer-fighting diet," Wright said. Apples are another traditional holiday mainstay with beneficial qualities, the Dana-Farber nutritionist said.

"Apples contains a chemical called quercetin, which protects the DNA in our cells from damage that can lead to the development of cancer," Wright said.

Crandall also pointed out the value of exercise, stress management and adequate sleep in maintaining good overall health.

"Walk one hour a day on the bike trail or on the Avenue," Crandall said. "Don't limit your exercise because of the holiday."

Avoiding confrontation with family members and maintaining a spirit of forgiveness also are powerful tools, the physician said.

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