

# Have a Happy, Healthy Holiday

You can eat right and still enjoy the pleasures of seasonal treats

**F**ood and drink go hand in hand with celebrating the holidays. And if you're hosting or helping, one of your jobs is to make sure special meals don't leave guests with unwanted aftereffects, such as feeling stuffed on rich goodies—or worse, feeling sick. The secret to those better morning afters is smart choices made by you in the planning and prepping of the food you serve. Here, experts guide you through the process to ensure that your holiday eats are healthful and tasty:

## MAKE THE RIGHT GROCERY BUYS

Serving a delicious, healthy holiday meal begins at the grocery store, but the choices can be confusing. The trick is to know which food labels are meaningful.

**Look for meat labels that matter** Whether your menu calls for turkey, beef, or pork, consider buying meat that's organic or raised without antibiotics. Experts (including 90 percent of doctors surveyed in a recent Consumer Reports poll) are concerned about using antibiotics for disease prevention or growth promotion in animals because it contributes to

antibiotic resistance. Organic practices also call for only organic feed and no growth hormones.

**Pick the best produce** Organic? Conventional? Local? The right choices will be based on availability and your personal preferences, concerns for the environment, and budget. Local produce can be healthier; nutrients may degrade if it takes too long for the produce to get to the store. Even in colder parts of the country, locally grown apples, sweet potatoes, and winter squash may be available during the holiday season. Organic produce is grown without the use of most pesticides or chemical fertilizers

and is not genetically engineered. Washing conventional fruits and vegetables in running water and rubbing hard will reduce pesticide residues (you don't need special washes), as will peeling. Still, some pesticides can remain on surfaces and some are systemic—they get into the produce flesh and can't be washed away.

**Spice it up right** "Sodium is used as a preservative in many canned and packaged foods," says Lauri Wright, Ph.D., R.D., assistant professor of nutrition at the University of South Florida. "So they have much more than if it was added just for taste." Look for "low sodium" products; they contain 140 mg or less per serving.

## Food Shopping? Ignore This Label Claim.

Antibiotics may be added to animal feed to promote growth and prevent disease. The unrestrained use of those drugs is a major factor in the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. That may make certain infections in humans more difficult to treat. That's why Consumer Reports recommends buying

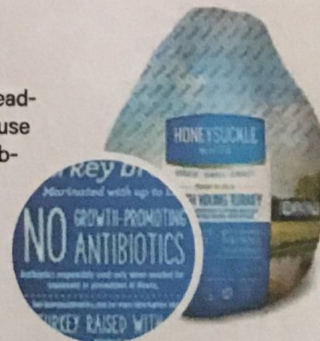
meat and poultry labeled "organic," "no antibiotics," or "raised without antibiotics."

At least one turkey producer, Cargill, is using the claim "no growth-promoting antibiotics" on its Honeysuckle White and Shady Brook Farms brands.

But don't be fooled: The claim, though technically

true, has little practical meaning. All producers should be phasing out growth-promoting antibiotics by 2017 anyway. And if the drugs continue to be widely used to prevent disease, we'll still be likely to have a problem with antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Know, too, that "no added hormones or steroids" is also a misleading claim because the use of those drugs is prohibited in any turkey.





To avoid added sugars use canned fruit packed in its own juice (no sugar added) and consider making cranberry sauce by boiling fresh or frozen berries with just enough orange juice and sugar to take the acidic edge off.

### PREPARE IT ALL SAFELY

In the frenzy of meal prep, we often neglect the basic rules of kitchen safety. “This is especially true during the holidays when you have several people in the kitchen,” says Shelley Feist, executive director at the Partnership for Food Safety Education. Consider these reminders:

**Plan ahead** “I always recommend cleaning out the refrigerator and freezer before you shop because you’re going to need all that room,” says Marianne H. Gravely, M.S., food safety specialist with the Department of Agriculture’s Meat and Poultry Hotline. Keep raw meat and poultry separate from other foods in your shopping cart, grocery bags, and fridge.

**Thaw in the fridge** “Food-poisoning bacteria grow rapidly at room temperature, and in 2 hours they can reach dangerous levels and develop toxins that can’t be killed with cooking,” Gravely warns. It takes one day of thawing for every 5 pounds of turkey. Keep it in a shallow roasting pan with sides to contain any juices that might leak out.

**Don’t rinse the bird** A Drexel University study found that rinsing poultry caused bacteria from the surface to splatter all over the kitchen.

**Clean carefully** Cross contamination goes beyond rookie mistakes such as using the same plate for raw and cooked meat and forgetting to wash your hands before you start food prep. For example, a Kansas State University study found that kitchen towels were the most contaminated with bacteria of all the surfaces tested. That’s because people often use them to wipe the counter or dry hands after rinsing (as opposed to using soap and water). And using your cell phone or tablet can be an unexpected source of contamination. “Every time you touch something during food prep is an opportunity to introduce contaminants into your food,” Feist says.

“So if you take a call, wash your hands again after you set the phone down.”

**Get meat up to temp** To kill any bacteria that may be present, cook beef and pork roasts and fresh hams to 145° F. For turkey, that magic number is 165° F. “Test turkey’s temperature in three areas—the breast, the thickest part of the thigh, and the wing,” Gravely says. It’s also safer not to stuff the bird (and stuffing extends cooking time), but if you do, make sure the stuffing reaches 165° F before you take the turkey out of the oven.

**Enjoy those leftovers** Be sure your fridge is set to just below 40° F (use a refrigerator thermometer to check). Get leftovers into the fridge or freezer within 2 hours of cooking. Pack food in small, shallow containers (to cool it more quickly). Never store turkey on the carcass because it’ll take too long for all the meat to chill.

### SERVE IT UP SMARTLY

“No one wants to feel like they’re depriving themselves, especially at the holidays,” says Lisa R. Young, Ph.D., R.D., adjunct professor of nutrition at New York University. But you can feed everyone well without putting them (or yourself) into a food coma. “You don’t need to think about eating less,” Young says. “Just think about balance.”

**Downsize your dishes** “When using a 9½- to 10-inch-diameter plate, people typically serve themselves 20 percent less than they do on an oversized plate,” says Brian Wansink, Ph.D., director of Cornell University’s Food and Brand Lab and author of “Slim by Design” (William Morrow, 2014). And replacing large serving spoons with regular-sized kitchen spoons results in a 14 percent reduction. “You’re going to take two or three spoonfuls of stuffing, regardless of spoon size,” Wansink says.

**Focus on the foods you love the most** There’s a lot of pressure at the holidays to eat everything. But don’t feel you have to load up on your sister’s special casserole unless you love it. Sample a small amount and be sure to rave about it, but if you’re going to indulge, do so with the foods you wait all year for.