

Tips & Treats for a Healthier Holiday Season

Halloween always brings out our greatest fears. They could come from ghost stories told around a campfire or the monsters lurking in your local Halloween attraction. But perhaps the greatest terror of all is right within your arm's reach. It's deceptively sweet and full of calories. Yes, it's the specter of bad eating habits!

Okay, maybe anxiety over eating isn't the scariest thing in the world. But you may be tempted to dig into the bags of candy your kids bring home this weekend. And with the days getting shorter and the weather getting colder, your opportunities to get outside and continue your workout schedule may be more limited.

To put those fears aside, we thought we would share some tricks and treats for eating healthy around Halloween and the rest of the holiday season. Feel free to share your own strategies for healthy eating with the rest of the Peak Pilates® community.

Fall Foods Packed With Nutrition

We may associate holiday festivities with indulging in big family meals and elaborate desserts. You may be surprised to find, however, that a number of foods that crop up around the fall season are incredibly healthy for you. For instance, many nutritionists have been extolling the virtues of **pumpkin seeds** for the last few years. These crunchy morsels are packed with magnesium, which helps in bone health, and can help reduce the risk of obesity and heart disease¹.

Sweet potatoes aren't just delicious; they're rich in beta-carotene and other anti-oxidants like vitamin C, which improve your body's defenses against the common cold and improve your skin². In addition, beta-carotene provides an excellent source of vitamin A, which at least one study has found to reduce the risk of stomach cancer³.

A close relative to the sweet potato, **butternut squash** is one of the most popular vegetables to have around wintertime. It too is packed with vitamin A, and butternut squash seeds are a great source of fiber and mono-unsaturated fatty acids, which aid in heart health⁴. So the next time you think you can't eat healthy around the holidays, remember these three ingredients can serve as both great snacks and even better meals.

Hydrate, Hydrate, Hydrate

With temperatures dropping, we typically turn to hot drinks like coffee, cocoa and apple cider to stay warm this fall. But don't forget the importance of staying hydrated when regulating your bodyweight. Water not only keeps us performing at our best throughout a session, but it has a ton of benefits for everyday activities. It removes waste from our body, regulates our body temperature and keeps the joints lubricated.

It also helps suppress our appetite and support our metabolism. A 2008 study found that participants drinking more water over the course of their regular diet actually saw greater weight loss results⁵. So if you're feeling famished in the middle of the workday or before your next meal, try a big glass of water instead. You may find yourself feeling less hungry and more energized.

Don't be Afraid to Enjoy the Season

At Peak Pilates, we teach workouts to be a process. Our mind/body exercises mean that we praise and support our students for the work completed correctly, rather than just the results of the work. It can be helpful to look at your diet the same way. What's most important is that you are developing healthy eating habits and sticking to your plan. The product of your hard work and discipline will emerge eventually.

There will be times, however, when you have a setback. You may find yourself indulging in several pieces of your kids' Halloween candy or having seconds during your next big holiday meal. Don't worry; one day will not offset weeks and months of dedication. And don't be afraid to enjoy the holiday season. It's a great time for family fun, so – like your healthy eating habits – consider your holiday activities to be part of the process toward a naturally happier life.

REFERENCES:

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² Bjarnadottir, Adda M.S. "Sweet Potatoes 101: Nutrition Facts and Health Benefits." Authority Nutrition, accessed October 24, 2016, <https://authoritynutrition.com/foods/sweet-potatoes/>

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4 Nutrition-and-You. "Butternut squash nutrition facts," accessed October 24, 2016, <http://www.nutrition-and-you.com/butternut-squash.html>

⁵ Stookey, J. D., Constant, F., Popkin, B. M. and Gardner, C. D. "Drinking water is associated with weight loss in overweight dieting women independent of diet and activity." *Obesity*. November 2008; (16)11: 2481–2488.