



# Healthy Cooking for the Holidays

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Dinner With the Doctor

**November 17, 2025**

South Bay Seventh-day Adventist Health Center



# Healthy Holidays

While food is one of the great pleasures of all festivities, planning ahead can help you make holiday celebrations healthier and happier occasions. Following some of these tips may mean that the slacks you are wearing now will still fit in January.

**EXERCISE!!!** Remain active as much as possible, even if it is only a 15-minute walk. Something is better than nothing, and the more exercise you can get during this busy time, the better you'll feel. In addition to the physical benefits, it is a great stress-reducer.

**REST!!!** Sleep (7-8 hours/night) is absolutely critical. Less sleep worsens insulin resistance, lowers the immune system, and lessens your chance of making other healthy choices. Schedule sleep as you would the parties. Consider attending fewer functions or leaving the party early.

**TAME YOUR APPETITE** Stay on a reasonable eating schedule. Eat a healthy high-fiber breakfast and lunch so you are not so hungry in the evening.

**REHEARSE YOUR CHOICES** Think about the event you are attending and imagine yourself making good choices. Decide what you will eat and drink before you go. And remember that if there are no good choices, it will not hurt you to go without.

**AT THE PARTY** Reduce how much you eat. Use a small plate. Take small bites, chew slowly, and enjoy the flavors. In other words, experience the food rather than inhaling it. Move away from the food area after you have eaten. Focus on people rather than food.

**CHOOSE HEALTHY DRINKS** Consider drinking water, sparkling or carbonated water with lemon or lime. The calories in other drinks quickly add up and are so quickly consumed (Grape juice – 180 cal/c; sodas – 150 cal/can; apple juice – 120 cal/cup; orange juice – 80 cal/cup). Avoid alcohol, not only for the calories it adds, but also its affect on the frontal lobe decision-making centers.

**PLANNING A PARTY** Center the party around something other than food. Sing, share holiday memories, do a scavenger hunt. Better yet, go caroling with a fruit basket to a shut-in or a lonely person in your neighborhood. Think of spreading cheer to others and your party will be a huge success.

## **IDEAS FOR HEALTHIER PARTY FOODS**

1. Use fresh vegetable and fruit platters – it takes longer to chew an apple than it does to drink a glass of juice or eat a piece of apple pie. Besides decreasing caloric intake, the added vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals are a boost to the immune system
  - a. Soaking fruit slices in pineapple juice until serving time adds a special flavor and keeps them from turning brown.
  - b. Use small shaped cutters to give an extra flair to carrot, cucumber, and apple slices
2. Choose low-fat or non-fat ingredients for holiday recipes – dips, spreads, breads, and dressings still taste good
3. Rather than high-calorie chips, use pita bread wedges (baked if you want them crispy), zwieback, or whole grain bread pieces for dips and spreads
4. Cut chocolate chips, nuts, and coconut in your favorite cookie recipes in half. In most cases the flavor will not be affected.
5. Substituting oil for margarine or butter makes a healthier recipe. In many cases the amount may be lowered.
6. Sprinkle powdered sugar on a cake instead of a frosting, or top with fresh berries or fruit compote. Dazzle your guests by laying a doily over the cake before sprinkling sugar.
7. Whatever you serve, serve attractively and people will think it is wonderful.

# Healthy Holiday Recipes

## Wild Rice Stuffing with Dried Cranberries

6 or more servings

### Ingredients

- 2 1/2 cups water with 1 TBSP McKay's vegan chicken-style seasoning, OR 1 TBSP Vegetable Better-than-Bouillon, OR vegetable broth of choice
- 2/3 cup raw wild rice
- 1 1/2 TBSP oil
- 1 medium red onion, chopped
- 2 large celery stalks, diced
- 3 cups whole-grain bread crumbs (about 6 slices bread)
- 2 tsp salt-free seasoning mix (like McCormicks Salt-Free Garlic and Herb, Spike or Mrs. Dash)
- 1/4 tsp dried thyme
- 1/3 cup dried cranberries
- 2 TBSP finely chopped walnuts
- 1/2 cup apple juice
- 1 lb Baked Tofu (see recipe)

### Directions

1. Bring the seasoned water or broth to a boil in a saucepan. Stir in the wild rice, reduce heat, then cover and simmer gently until the rice is soft, about 35 minutes. Water should be absorbed; if not, drain.
2. Sauté the onion and celery in oil over a medium heat until both are golden.
3. Tear 3 – 4 slices bread into a food processor and grind briefly into crumbs. Process more bread, enough to get 3 cups. Place in a mixing bowl.
4. Mix salt-free seasoning and thyme into the bread crumbs.
5. Add the onion-celery mixture, the cooked wild rice, cranberries and walnuts to the bread crumbs. Stir gently to combine. Drizzle the apple juice in slowly, continuing to stir, until the mixture is evenly moistened. Add a bit more juice if necessary.
6. Gently pack the mixture into a lightly oiled, 9 x 9" baking dish. Tuck tofu slices into the dish in two rows with stuffing between each slice (or lay along the top). Bake for 25 to 30 minutes at 350 F, or until the top begins to get slightly crusty. Cover and keep warm until serving.
7. Serve with gravy or cranberry sauce.

### Tips

- Rather than using tofu slices, cut tofu into cubes, marinate, and bake. Mix them into the stuffing after apple juice is added.
- Tofu can be replaced with commercial vegan turkey slices.
- For a flavorful addition, mix in 1 large peeled, cored and diced apple.
- Use cashews to replace walnuts, leave in larger bits
- Consider sautéing mushrooms with the onions and celery.
- Another trick is to use a mix of wild (1/3 cup) and brown rice (1/2 cup)

## Baked Tofu

### Ingredients

1lb firm or extra-firm tofu  
3 TBSP soy sauce  
1 TBSP oil  
1 – 2 TBSP water  
2 tsp garlic powder  
1 tsp onion powder  
1/2 tsp coriander, ground (optional)  
1/2 tsp celery seed, ground if available (optional)

### Directions

1. Freeze tofu in its box for at least 24 hours. Remove from freezer and let it completely thaw before cutting.
2. Drain and press the tofu to remove as much extra water as possible. Cut into 1/4" slices or 1/2" cubes.
3. Mix remaining ingredients into a marinade.
4. Place tofu slices in the marinade mixture long enough for them to soak up marinade. Make sure slices are coated on both sides. (Cubes are most readily mixed with the marinade in a plastic bag or in an oversize plastic container with a lid so they can be shaken around more easily.) Lay tofu out on an oiled baking sheet. Spray the top with a vegetable-based oil spray if desired.
5. Bake at 400 F for 15 minutes. Turn and bake an additional 5 - 15 minutes or until tofu is quite dry and beginning to brown. (You do not want the tofu tough, so do not bake too long.)

### Tip

- An air fryer is a great way to simplify this process.
- Tofu keeps well in the refrigerator (IF you can keep your family from eating it straight out of the oven. ☺ )

## Herbed Gravy

### Ingredients

4 cups water, divided  
1/2 cup raw cashews  
1/3 cup yeast flakes  
1/4 cup cornstarch  
1 TBSP onion powder  
2 tsp salt  
1/2 tsp basil  
1/2 tsp garlic powder  
1/4 tsp oregano

### Directions

1. Blend all ingredients except 3 cups of water until very smooth.
2. Pour blended ingredients into a saucepan. Rinse blender with the remaining water and add to pan.
3. Lightly boil 1 – 2 minutes, stirring, until thickened.

### Tip

- If a thinner gravy is desired, add up to 1/2 cup extra water.
- Gravy keeps well in refrigerator for reheating at a later time.

# Vegan Green Bean Casserole

4 to 6 servings

## Ingredients

1 lb frozen green beans

## Sauce

10 oz fresh mushrooms, (regular button and shiitake mushrooms are good)

3 cloves garlic, minced or 1 TBSP minced garlic in a jar

Pinch of cayenne pepper or to taste

Salt to taste

2 TBSP flour

3/4 cup vegetable broth of choice

1 1/2 tsp lemon juice

3/4 cup soy creamer (or full-fat unsweetened soymilk)

## Topping

1 1/2 slices whole grain bread

1 TBSP margarine

1/8 tsp salt

1/8 tsp garlic powder

1/8 tsp onion powder

1/2 tsp rosemary

1 TBSP nutritional yeast flakes

## Directions

1. To prepare the topping, put all ingredients into a food processor and pulse until crumbly. Pour into a bowl and set aside.
2. To make the sauce, trim and discard the mushroom stems and chop the mushrooms into pieces. Heat a small amount of oil in a fry pan. Add the mushrooms, garlic, cayenne, and salt. Cook until mushrooms are very soft and exude their juices.
3. Whisk the flour into the vegetable broth and lemon juice. Add to the mushrooms and simmer until thickened, stirring constantly to prevent lumps from forming. Add the soy creamer and continue simmering until thick, about 5 to 10 minutes. Adjust the seasonings to taste.
4. Cook green beans according to package directions. Drain into a colander and spray with cold water for a minute to stop cooking process. Shake to remove as much water as possible.
5. To assemble, add beans to the hot sauce and pour into an oiled casserole baking dish. Sprinkle with the topping. Bake at 425 F for about 15 minutes until bubbly and topping has browned. Serve immediately.

## Tips

- To prep ahead, refrigerate the casserole and topping separately. To prepare for serving, bring casserole to room temperature then sprinkle on the topping. Bake for about 20 minutes or until heated through and topping is browned.
- A healthy alternative to the “oft-thought-of,” “must-have” French-fried onions is to sauté thinly-sliced onions in a bit of vegetable broth until golden and caramelized. Add to the top of the casserole before sprinkling on the topping.
- For a stronger mushroom flavor add a bit of mushroom seasoning available in Asian markets.

# Roasted Vegetables with Pecan Crumble

8 - 10 servings

## Crumble Ingredients

1/2 cup packed dark brown sugar

1/2 cup pecans, chopped

1/4 cup all-purpose or gluten-free flour

3 TBSP margarine, at room temperature

Pinch of smoked paprika

Salt to taste

## Vegetable Ingredients

4 medium sweet potatoes, peeled and sliced into 1/4-inch-thick rounds

1 small butternut squash, peeled, seeded and cut into 3/4-inch cubes

1 lb carrots, peeled and cut into 2 1/2-inch sticks

3 TBSP oil

2 tsp thyme, ground

1 1/2 tsp salt

## Directions

1. For the crumble: Preheat the oven to 425°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Combine the brown sugar, pecans, flour, margarine, paprika and a pinch of salt in a medium bowl and make into a crumbly mixture with a fork or fingers. Spread the mixture thinly on the baking sheet and bake until everything has melted together and the crumble is golden brown, 5 to 7 minutes. (Lean toward a longer bake to get sugar around the edges well-crisped.) Let cool completely, about 20 minutes. Use your hands to crumble the mixture and set aside. (If mixture is not crisp enough to easily break, spread out on the pan and return to the oven for another few minutes.)
2. For the vegetables: Combine the sweet potatoes, squash, carrots, oil, thyme, and salt in a large bowl and toss. Divide the vegetables between 2 baking sheets, spread them in an even layer and roast, switching the pans halfway through, until the vegetables are softened and golden brown in spots, 30 to 35 minutes. Transfer to a platter and top with the crumble.

# Holiday Salad

## Ingredients

1 large head romaine lettuce, chopped  
3/4 cup red grapes, sliced  
2 mandarin oranges, peeled and sliced in half, segments separated  
1 small onion, finely diced  
2 TBSP dried cranberries or raisins  
1 small apple, chopped  
1/4 - 1/2 cup chopped pecans, raw  
1/3 cup pomegranate seeds (optional)  
1 slice of bread (optional)

## Dressing

1 TBSP maple syrup  
1 TBSP extra virgin olive oil  
1 TBSP lemon juice  
1/8 tsp coriander  
2 - 3 pinches of orange zest  
A pinch of cayenne  
1/4 tsp salt or to taste

## Directions

1. Prep all salad ingredients and place in a large bowl.
2. Mix dressing ingredients in a separate bowl.
3. Pour dressing over the salad. Toss and mix gently, but very well, to evenly distribute the flavors.
4. For a “Christmas star” tree topper, simply toast any slice of bread. Use either your knife (free-hand) or a star-shaped cookie cutter, to cut out a star for the top the salad.
5. Serve immediately.

## Tips

- Dip apple chunks in pineapple juice to add a special flavor as well as keeping them from turning brown.
- Consider other nuts or other fruit choices.

# **Creamy Pumpkin Pie Bars**

## Ingredients

1 recipe Crumble Crust (see recipe below)  
2 3/4 cups pumpkin purée (1 1/2 cans)  
1/4 cup maple syrup  
1/4 cup sugar  
1/4 cup unsweetened plain almond milk  
2 1/2 TBSP cornstarch  
1 3/4 tsp pumpkin pie spice (or sub mix of ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg & cloves)  
1/4 tsp salt  
Coconut whipped cream topping

## Instructions

1. Prepare crust according to directions in recipe below. Put into a 9" x 12" baking dish and bake until just turning golden.
2. Add all remaining ingredients except whipped cream to the blender (or food processor) and blend until smooth, scraping down sides as needed. Taste and adjust seasonings to taste, adding more maple syrup or sugar for sweetness, or pumpkin pie spice for flavor. May need an extra pinch of cinnamon.
3. Pour the filling into the crust and tap on counter to remove air bubbles. Bake for 50 minutes - 1 hour. The filling will still be just a bit jiggly, dark orange in color, and have some cracks on the top - this is normal.
4. Remove from oven and let cool completely before loosely covering with plastic wrap or foil and transferring to the refrigerator to fully set up, preferably overnight.
5. When ready to serve, cut into bar size of choice. Put on a plate and serve with a dollop of coconut whipped cream.
6. Bars will keep in refrigerator for 3 – 4 days.

# **Crumble Crust**

## Ingredients

1/2 cup unsweetened coconut  
1/2 cup raw almonds  
3/4 cup quick oats  
Scant 1/2 tsp salt  
3 TBSP honey (warm and runny)

## Directions

1. Place coconut, almonds, oats, and salt in food processor. Blend until all ingredients are small, even-sized crumbs.
2. Add 2 TBSP warm honey and blend about 15 seconds. Test with fingers. If it is dry and crumbly add a bit more honey and mix. Mixture should stick together slightly when pressed. Do not get too wet or it will not be tender and light.
3. Press into a lightly-oiled pie pan or a 9x13" baking pan. A piece of plastic wrap may help keeping mixture from sticking to fingers.
4. Bake at 375 F for 8 - 10 minutes, just until golden brown.