

Celebrate Healthy

Tip Sheet

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Best practice: Celebrate holidays with mostly healthy foods and non-food treats.

Rationale: Facilities can help move toward a healthier way of celebrating by minimizing the unhealthy food and maximizing the other fun things that go along with holiday celebrations. Sandwiches can be cut in heart shapes and oranges can be made to look like Halloween masks. This is also a good time to look at traditions from other cultures that may involve healthier foods or non-food celebrations.ⁱ

Nearly all holidays have some traditional association with food. When Valentine's Day approaches, we expect candy hearts. St. Patrick's Day is celebrated with green food, most likely Jell-O and frosting and green tinted treats. Easter baskets filled with chocolate bunnies and candy eggs is the norm. When birthdays come, we look forward to birthday cakes or cupcakes. Halloween is all about the candy and treats. Thanksgiving creates visions of side dishes and pies and uncomfortably full stomachs. Christmas is about the cookies, candies and other treats. And those are just the holidays. When we celebrate milestones, e.g., when children move up to the next level or graduate from preschool, kindergarten and high school; we celebrate with parties and treats, ice cream and pizza.

The more we as adults associate holiday celebrations with food, the more likely children are to grow up with the same emotional dependence on food—food for comfort, food for celebrations and food for holidays. This leads to unhealthy habits where we use food for reasons other than to feed our hunger. Adults who struggle with weight issues, spend a lifetime trying to overcome this emotional dependency on food. We have an opportunity to shift the dialogue and holiday expectations when children are young. Encourage children, staff and parents to be creative and consider ways to change the focus of their celebrations away from unhealthy foods.

This is the ideal and a very worthy goal. But we still have warm memories and enjoy celebrating holidays with food and we've heard time and again that any food in moderation isn't all bad. Strive to find a balance. One way to hang on to tradition is to allow a few treats but add physical activity and healthier options to the celebration. Consider explaining treats using the Go, Slow, Whoa Foods curriculum. If chocolate is offered on Valentine's Day, offer it in moderation and help the children to understand that "chocolate is a whoa food, we can't have it every day, but now and then it's OK to enjoy this kind of treat and Valentine's Day is the perfect time to do so."

Tips and Strategies adapted from NAP SACCⁱⁱ:

- Staff should inform parents early of their policy to serve healthier foods for holidays. It's easier to get buy-in for this when parents enroll their children and learn that the facility is working hard to create the healthiest environment possible for their children.
- Give parents ideas for quick and nutritious foods that can be easily purchased and are suitable for birthdays and other celebrations (ex. already sliced fruit or vegetable trays,

mini muffins, etc.).

- Encourage non-food treats, like bubbles and party hats (colorful themes paper plates, napkins and cups are another way to celebrate and make healthier options still feel like a treat). Be careful to use a tone that is matter-of-fact rather than judgmental to avoid offending parents.
- Encourage parents to think about their child's favorite things, other than foods, that can be included in the celebration. This might include a favorite song, book, or game. Offer to include these special things in planning activities for a child's birthday.
- Often the biggest treat of all is for the parent to make a brief visit to school to help celebrate the birthday.
- Have the facility host a recipe contest and ask staff to compete to create the healthiest and best tasting food for a celebration. Offer a prize.
- As part of a celebration, fill a piñata with toothbrushes, raisins, stickers, jump ropes, and other fun foods and toys.
- Use this as an opportunity to investigate other cultures and their traditions. Many facilities work hard to acknowledge the special foods and traditions of a variety of holidays, such as Kwanzaa and Chanukah, in addition to Christmas. Ask parents who celebrate these holidays to help you find healthier foods or non-food ways to celebrate the holiday.

Consider these additional tips to share with families (a wonderful way to meet your goals and to "share nutrition and physical educational tips with parents" around the holidays.)

- Begin the day with a physical activity. Check out your community for holiday fitness runs/walks, take your family for a walk around the neighborhood, dance as a family to holiday songs, play holiday active games and so on.
- Begin the day with a low calorie but protein-rich breakfast to sustain you through the day and help to prevent you from overeating when the main celebration begins.
- Celebrate with special treats... paper plates, napkins, favors and flowers.
- Offer food in moderation and think portion control--mini cupcakes, bite size cookies and portioned-out-snacks in colorful mini muffin cups
- Serve fruit, vegetables, cheese, nuts, and special crackers instead of high fat and high sugar treats.
- Look for recipes to slim down your holiday favorites.
- Follow the My Plate advice and make sure at least half your plate is filled with fruit and vegetables to help fill you up. Fill the rest of your plate with other holiday foods so you don't feel deprived.
- If you're the guest, bring a healthy dish to a pass. If you're the hostess, plan healthy options for your guests. See Pinterest for creative holiday healthy options.
- Fruit by itself makes an excellent dessert. Place berries or cut up fruit in colorful paper muffin cups or in crystal/or plastic stemmed glasses. Place an attractive bowl with grapes, apples or clementines on the table.

- Serve vegetables with a low fat dip (Greek yogurt instead of sour cream or mayonnaise, hummus or other bean dips, low fat or fat free mayo is easily disguised when you add spices, herbs and flavoring). Keep the calories low.
- Serve water (with fruit or vegetables), low fat milk, seltzer, seltzer in punch to lighten the sugar, etc. Avoid beverages that are high in calories and sugar.
- Add activity into your plan for the day. Can you play an active game? Will your guests enjoy a post-dinner walk? Even a game of charades gets people up and moving.

And finally, in the classroom or in the home, use cooking projects to make any snack or treat more appealing. When children help prepare foods, they are more excited about trying and tasting new foods. With this kind of excitement, they won't even miss the candy, cake, cookies and treats. Pinterest has a number of creative ideas. We share a few here, but take time to go on line at <https://www.pinterest.com/> for more ideas. On-line links for the Pinterest photos below are included at the bottom of this section.

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Slide 1

Broccoli Christmas Tree: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/372180356688597506/>
Jack O Lantern w/ Baby Carrots: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/139682025923110049/>
Veggie Tray Owl: <https://www.laurieberkner.com/blog>
Turkey Veggie Tray: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/470696598533977183/>
Palm Tree w/ Fruit: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/Ab0u61hDdOpPX7WH2DcvddWI00C5s-sFNCQLEqzZF6ClXkzKrdMmb1w/>

Slide 2

Under the Sea Grahams: <https://thefirstyearblog.com/under-the-sea-graham-crackers/>
Owl on Grahams (Smoes): <https://www.livinglocurto.com/owl-smoes/>
Pancake Kabobs: https://www.tablespoon.com/recipes/nutella-mini-pancake-kabobs/16e84ab3-970b-469b-9d1a-615de9ad2c4b?utm_medium=social&utm_source=pinterest&utm_campaign=brunch&rlt.pid=cam.p.ai3mhavz6m6d
Breakfast popsicles: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/ATROngT8eb1XiX8BQBjmK80rwcXicz2jdkdM-ulXySk7s0VJpw7x3gc/>
String Cheese Snowman: <http://activitiesforkids.com/frozen-party-ideas/>

Slide 3

Halloween Brooms: <https://onelittleproject.com/halloween-treat-cheese-pretzel-broomsticks/>
Carrot Pumpkins: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/489766528209557944/>
Banana Ghosts, Clementine Pumpkins: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/367958232051797857/>
Cheese Block Snowmen: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/201606520790844776/>

Slide 4

Owl: <http://primarylearninglogs.blogspot.com/2012/01/owl-snacks.html>
Rolled Banana: <http://ldylvbgr.blogspot.com/2009/02/rolled-banana-snacks.html>
Veggie Boats: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/AdQW3NE35vZPJegjIcncPknqsrpPFX5mepsclYocGGglZnC1w-ezVo/>
French Toast Faces: <http://supercutefood.tumblr.com/post/3741889426>
Mini Quiches: https://www.bloglovin.com/blogs/eats-amazing-4231977/easy-mini-quiches-recipe-4371206424?utm_content=buffer77cf8&utm_medium=social&utm_source=pinterest.com&utm_campaign=buffer

Slide 5

Pita Trees: <https://www.pillsbury.com/recipes/pita-tree-appetizers/865bfc04-edc4-41d0-b23b-8f13ebcdf7ea>
Santa Pancakes: <https://blessedbeyondcrazy.com/cute-christmas-breakfast-ideas-kids/#more-15737>
Santa with Bananas and Strawberries: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/164874036336129791/>
Santa Head with Grapes and Strawberries: <https://www.yellowblissroad.com>
Cucumber Christmas Tree: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/d1/92/bc/d192bcc5ef67173da80fa3de2fef1214.jpg>

For free downloadable and printable resources and information on staff support for celebrating healthy, visit:

<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2016/11/healthy-holiday-foods-fun>

<https://www.stemilt.com/stem-blog/eating-healthy-during-holidays/>

<https://www.seventhgeneration.com/blog/10-tips-eating-healthy-during-holidays>

<https://blogs.chihealth.com/celebrate-healthy-habits-this-holiday-season/>

https://www.scusd.edu/sites/main/files/file-attachments/healthy_school_celebrations.pdf

<https://d3knp61p33sjvn.cloudfront.net/2017/12/DGTipsheet32MakeHealthierHolidayChoices.pdf>

ⁱ NAP SACC Consultant Technical Assistance Manual, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Page 33 and 34.

ⁱⁱ NAP SACC Consultant Technical Assistance Manual, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Page 33 and 34.

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