

HEALTHY LIVING

The bad side of HOLIDAY FEASTING

Feeling ill? It may not be from the flu, but the food you've been wolfing down

BY HELENA OLIVIERO
Cox News Service

It's time for holiday parties — Swedish meatballs, bite-size quiches and homemade eggnog. And if the host isn't careful, it's also a time for making guests sick.

Dr. Frank Rasler of DeKalb Medical Center in metro Atlanta, like many emergency room doctors, witnesses a jump in patients with flulike symptoms in December. But in many cases, the culprit in all that suffering is not a virus. It's food poisoning — stemming from something they've eaten, such as undercooked meat or potato salad or other holiday party foods left out for hours and hours, he says.

Body aches, fatigue, vomiting and fever are common symptoms for the flu and food poisoning, according to doctors.

"We see it every day, and often times, it's hard to tell the difference from the symptoms," he says. "I'll ask, 'Have you been to a holiday buffet?' ... Sometimes a whole family will get sick and it will be like a mini-epidemic, and I will ask, 'Where did you eat last night?'"

While people can get foodborne illnesses from get-togethers any time of year, holiday festivities can be breeding grounds for bacteria because food sometimes stays out on platters for several hours while partygoers snack and mingle.

Doctors say resting and drinking plenty of fluids (not just water but also sports drinks and other liquids to replenish potassium and sodium) are the keys to recovering from food poisoning, which can strike within two hours after leaving a party or be delayed for 24 hours.

Recovery should take place within a couple of days. Anyone who suspects serious dehydration or cannot keep liquids down for 24 hours should seek medical attention, doctors say. ■



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Emergency rooms get many patients in December who think they have the flu, when they actually are suffering food poisoning from improperly prepared food.

Need diet going into holidays? Here are some rules

BY CAROLYN O'NEIL
Cox News Service

The holidays may not seem like the ideal time to start a diet. After all, isn't this the season when platters of cookies litter the office and neighbors invite you over for huge holiday buffets? Add to that the family celebrations with your aunt's triple chocolate fudge and uncle's rum-soaked eggnog, and the holidays can be a minefield of fattening foods.

But ask yourself, "Is it really any different the rest of the year?" Every season brings its own temptations from Super Bowl Sunday's snacks to Fourth of July fried chicken and ribs. So why not resolve to recognize these waist-widening challenges and learn to apply some slimming strategies when the landscape is fat with indulgent food choices.

Research shows that the most successful dieters — those who lose weight and keep it off for the long haul — practice healthy eating and exercise habits all year long. They don't have New Year's diet resolutions that lapse by Jan. 31 because they don't make big promises that are impossible to keep.

Instead, set a time limit or portion limit. "I'll only eat french fries once a month." Or "I'll only eat ice cream in a really small bowl."

There's no time like the present to make a fresh start and begin new healthier eating habits — even if you're headed to a holiday party tonight. So hit the reset button and follow the fresh start rules to help your hips survive the holidays.

Fresh start diet rules

1. Freshen up your food life. Keep fresh fruit and other healthy snacks such as whole-grain crackers, nuts and fresh veggies on hand at home. A handful of almonds or walnuts before heading out to a party can calm your appetite so you don't dive into the buffet the minute you arrive. Stock your pantry with whole-grain pastas and brown rice and your fridge with low-fat or nonfat milk and yogurts.

2. Recognize barriers. It's going to be tough to say no to holiday favorites like chocolate fudge and that creamy, cheesy, hot artichoke dip. Know your splurge foods and resolve to enjoy them in small quantities. Use a small plate to serve yourself. Research shows that your mind will think it looks like a lot more food than the same amount on a large plate.

3. Enjoy the taste of eating right. Did you know that the deviled eggs, steamed shrimp, roast beef and chicken on skewers often served at holiday dinner parties are all diet-friendly, lean protein choices? Feel free to add low-cal flavor with mustards, horseradish, cocktail sauce and salsas. Remember that some foods are actually allies in the weight-loss war. Broth-based soups, veggies, fruit and whole grains fill you up without filling you out.

4. Start new habits. Keep a list of what you're eating and drinking for a few days. Be as specific as possible on types of foods and amounts. Don't know what a cup of mashed potatoes looks like? Get out some measuring cups and become familiar with portion sizes. This snapshot will help you keep track of overeating, and while you're at it, write down your physical activity. Did you take the stairs instead of the escalator at the mall? That counts, too!

5. Have a plan. Eat breakfast. Schedule time to take a walk or go to yoga class. If you're going to a potluck, bring the salad or vegetable side dish. If Friday involves a big dinner party, eat less on Thursday and walk more on Saturday. If it's a three-hour car ride to Grandma's, pack fresh fruit and a turkey sandwich for the road so you don't have to stop at a fast-food joint. Save the calories to enjoy holiday treats when you get to Grandma's. Successful long-term weight control is a balancing act. Keep in mind that most people gain about one pound over the holidays. That doesn't sound like much, but if you don't lose it, after 10 years that's 10 pounds. If you maintain your weight this time of year, that's great! ■

THE FLU, OR SOMETHING YOU ATE?

The flu

- **Common symptoms:** body aches, headache, muscle aches, fever
- **Less common:** nausea
- **Rare:** diarrhea

Note: Nausea and diarrhea sometimes accompany the flu in children.

Food poisoning

- **Common symptoms:** body aches, headache, muscle aches, nausea and diarrhea
- **Less common:** fever
- **Rare:** nasal congestion, sore throat

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, DeKalb Medical, MayoClinic.com

TIPS FOR PREPARING, SERVING PARTY FOOD

- **Safe food handling:** Always wash your hands before and after handling food. Always serve food on clean plates — not those previously holding raw meat or poultry.
- **Cook meat thoroughly:** Beef should reach an internal temperature of 145 degrees. Pork should reach 160 degrees. And poultry should reach a minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees.

- **The two-hour rule:** Foods should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours. Keep track of how long foods have been sitting out, and discard anything left out for two hours or more.
- **Keep hot foods hot; cold foods cold:** Hot foods should be held at 140 degrees or warmer (you can use chafing dishes or slow cookers or warming trays). Cold foods should be held at 40 degrees or colder (you can nest dishes in bowls of ice or use small serving bowls and replace them).

Source: USDA Food Safety & Inspection Service

WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION

- Frequent episodes of vomiting for more than two days
- Vomiting blood
- Inability to keep liquids down for 24 hours
- Severe diarrhea for more than three days
- Blood in bowel movements
- Extreme pain or severe abdominal cramping
- A fever of 101.5 or higher
- Signs or symptoms of dehydration (excessive thirst, dry mouth, little or no urination, severe weakness, dizziness or lightheadedness)

Source: MayoClinic.com ■



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Remember to cook meat thoroughly before serving: This pork should have an internal temperature of 160 degrees before serving.