Eating for holiday energy

If you're feeling less than energetic during this holiday season, take a quick look at your recent eating habits. How and what you eat—among other things—determines how you feel and perform. Typical holiday "energy drainers" such as dehydration, going too long between meals, or eating the wrong combination of foods can leave you sluggish, energy deprived, and take the enjoyment out of this festive time. But with a few smart choices you can maximize your energy level and keep pace with the hustle and bustle of the season's events.

Breakfast—It is the Most Important Meal of the Day

Having a proper breakfast has many advantages. Breakfast-eaters tend to have higher metabolisms, fewer cravings, eat less at night, and have higher intakes of vitamin C and iron. Breakfast can also improve concentration. Eat within one to two hours of getting up.

Ideas for healthy breakfasts:

- Cereal with milk and fruit
- Whole wheat toast with peanut butter and fruit
- Cottage cheese with fruit and bagel
- Bagel with cheese and tomato
- Egg with English muffin and fruit

The Right Combination

For each meal, choose food from three out of the four food groups of Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. This is a good rule of thumb to ensure that you are eating balanced meals that include carbohydrate and protein. A balanced meal should satisfy you for about three to six hours. If you include protein and a little fat with meals, this will help to control your appetite and hold you over even longer before hunger returns.

- **Key high carbohydrate foods.** Whole grain breads, pasta, brown rice, beans, peas, lentils, potatoes, crackers, higher fibre cereals, fruits.
- **Key protein foods.** Lean meat, pork, veal, fish, poultry, eggs, cheese, beans, peas/lentils, tofu, nuts, seeds, peanut butter.
- **Added fats.** Mayonnaise, butter/margarine, oils, salad dressings—add small amounts to meals.
- **Hidden fats.** Baked goods, snack foods, cookies, cakes, pies, chocolate bars, ice cream, potato chips, processed meats, french fries—these should be a minimal part of your diet.

Timing is Everything

Eat regularly, every three to six hours when hungry. Plan healthy snacks for between meals to keep you feeling full and satisfied.

Feed Your Need for Energy with Healthy Snacks

Carbohydrates usually satisfy your appetite for about two hours. They are ideal as snacks to hold you over until a meal.

Suggested carbohydrate snacks:

- Low-fat crackers and cookies
- Cereals that don't need milk
- Homemade trail mix (pretzels, cereal, dried fruit)
- Fruit or diluted fruit juice
- Muffins (small low-fat ones)
- Popcorn—light microwave or air popped

Snacking ideas—carbohydrate and protein:

- Chocolate milk
- Veggies and hummus
- Slice of cheese or cheese string and low-fat crackers
- Dried cereal and small box of raisins
- Low-fat muffin and slice of cheese
- Yogurt with nuts/seeds or high fibre cereal
- Energy bar piece

Make Lunch a High Energy Meal

Lunch ideas with carbohydrates and protein:

- Sandwiches/subs—turkey, chicken, lean ham
- Broth-based soups—vegetable, split pea, bean, barley
- Stir fry—shrimp, chicken with steamed rice
- Vegetarian pizza
- Pasta with tomato sauce
- Bean burrito
- Hummus in pita
- Teriyaki dishes made with little oil

Hydration Equation

Water is involved in almost every process in the body. If you're not getting enough, your performance will most likely suffer. Signs of dehydration include fatigue, headaches, dizziness, and dark, scant urine. Signs that you're well hydrated: light coloured or clear urine, going to the washroom frequently.

Hydrate with water, juice, milk, non-caffeinated herbal teas, other non-caffeinated, non-alcoholic beverages. Six to eight glasses of water a day are recommended. Try keeping a thermos jug at your desk or in the fridge and add lime, lemon or cucumber slices for a refreshing glass anytime.

During the holiday season, food seems to be the main part of every event. With never-ending parties, outings and celebrations to attend it can be quite easy to develop poor eating habits. This season, skip the high calorie sweets and instead reach for delicious and nutritious high energy foods that will have you feeling healthy and looking fabulous.