

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

Healthy Holiday Treats Part 2: The Dinner Table

When most of us think of the holidays, we think of sharing meals with family and friends. Popular holiday dishes have reached such iconic status that it's difficult to imagine celebrating without them.

Fortunately, many of the ingredients in traditional holiday fare are rich in nutrients, as long as they are prepared nutritiously. Part one of this Optimal Health University™ series described the health benefits of popular holiday spices, nuts and chocolate. Now, Dr. Gravesen explores more healthful dishes of the season.

Turkey

Turkey is a holiday favorite. It is well known for containing a generous amount of tryptophan. This essential amino acid is often blamed for the drowsiness many people experience after holiday meals, although some scientists believe that a heavy, carbohydrate-rich meal is the real culprit (*Nutr Rev* 2008;66:549-57).

Tryptophan is a serotonin precursor. Tryptophan is necessary for the body to produce serotonin, the "feel-good" chemical that many antidepressant medications are designed to stimulate. Research indicates that tryptophan may control mild depression (*Psychopharmacology* 2006;187:121).

Turkey is also a good source of selenium, an important trace mineral that supports thyroid health (*Thyroid* 2007;17:609-12).

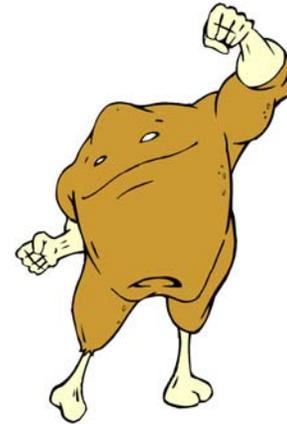
Winter Squashes

Winter squashes include pumpkin, butternut, acorn and many more. While the different species of winter squash are all high in carotenoids, they have different ratios of these powerful antioxidants (*J Agric Food Chem* 2007;55:4027-33).

A study in Japan linked a high intake of carotenoid-rich fruits and vegetables with reduced risk of high blood sugar, a precursor for diabetes (*J Epidemiol* 2002;12:357-66).

Even the seeds of winter squashes — a satisfying snack when toasted — are a nutritional powerhouse. They contain generous amounts of manganese, magnesium and phosphorus.

Pumpkin seeds are also one of the best dietary sources of phytosterols, plant compounds believed to suppress the body's absorption of cholesterol (*J*

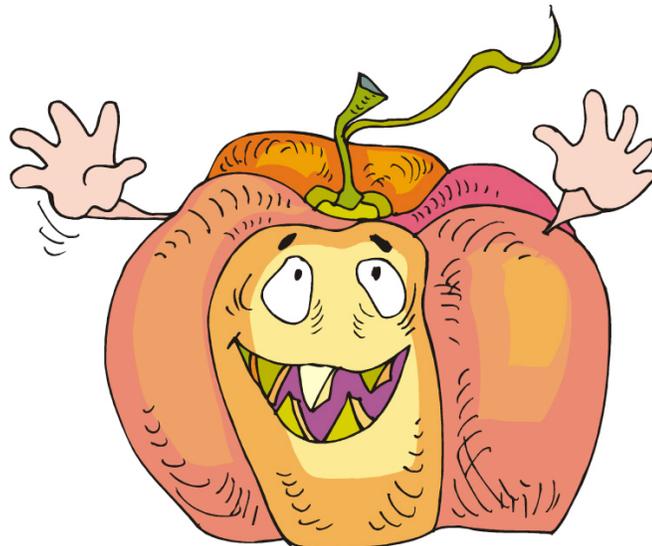


Agric Food Chem 2005;53).

Cranberries

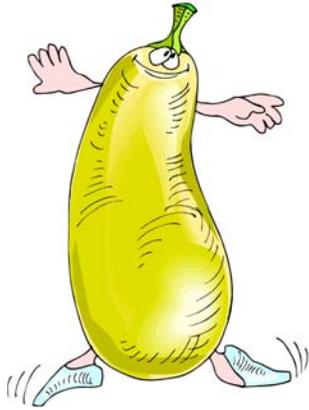
Harvested in the fall, cranberries grace our holiday tables. These fruits are famous for aiding in urinary health. And, the same anti-adhesive properties of cranberries that prevent bacteria from sticking to the urinary tract may also protect the stomach (*Crit Rev Food Sci Nutr* 2002;42:279-84).

Cranberries offer many other health benefits via their extraordinary levels of antioxidants.



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An analysis performed by the US Department of Agriculture ranked cranberries as a superior source of antioxidants. They are loaded with phytochemicals that decrease inflammation and protect against many cancers and vascular diseases (*Mol Nutr Food Res* 2007;51:652-64).



Sweet potatoes

Baked or mashed, sweet potatoes are a delicious source of a form of vitamin A known as beta carotene. This nutrient has long been known to guard the body against infection by enhancing the development and differentiation of white blood cells (*Biofactors* 2010; Epub).

A plant protein called WSSP-AGP is another health-boosting component of sweet potatoes. In a recently published trial, mice that received WSSP-AGP had lower levels of plasma glucose. Researchers believe that this sweet potato derived protein can be used to control blood sugar (*J Agric Food Chem* 2010; Epub)

Okra

Okra — also known in some countries as lady’s fingers — is an edible seed pod that originated in Africa and was brought to the West in the 1600s. It continues to be a popular vegetable in the traditional cuisine of the southern United States. Okra graces the tables of many feasts celebrating Kwanzaa.

When cooked, okra releases mucilage that is often used to thicken soups and stews. Researchers have found that this “slime” inhibits the ability of bacteria to adhere to the lining of the gastrointestinal tract, supporting the practice in some Asian countries of using okra to protect the stomach (*J Agric Food Chem* 2004;52:1495-503).

The mucilage-filled cooking liquid of okra is also widely used as a home remedy to soothe irritation from the common cold.

Latkes

Latkes are fried potato pancakes traditionally eaten during Hanukkah. The oil in which they are cooked commemorates the oil that kept Jerusalem’s temple lamp lit for eight days.

Potatoes, the main ingredient in latkes, are an under-appreciated nutritional workhorse. Beside being a good source of vitamins B6 and C as well as fiber, potatoes are packed with polyphenols, a class of antioxidants believed to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease (*Plant Biotechnol J* 2008;6:870-86; *Am J Clin Nutr* 2005;81:317S-325S).

In moderation fried foods can be part of an overall healthy diet. However, choose your cooking oil with care.

Canola oil, touted as a healthy choice, is highly processed with deodorizers and the solvent hexane, a toxic chemical that remains in trace amounts when used in food processing. Some animal studies also show that the fatty acid composition of canola oil elevates blood pressure and increases plasma lipids. Healthier alternatives include olive oil and coconut oil.

Greens

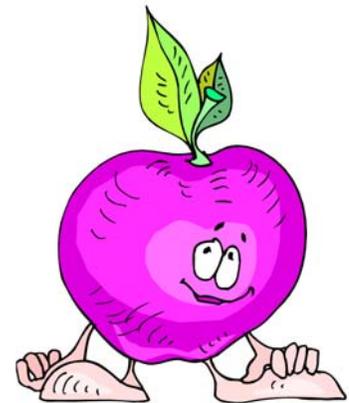
Several foods are reputed to bring good luck when eaten on New Year’s Day. These include cooked greens such as kale and collard greens, whose green color denotes them a precursor to money for the superstitious. Even if you don’t believe they will bring you

financial luck, greens are packed with vitamins to bring you good health.

Greens are particularly notable for their high vitamin K content. The body uses vitamin K in blood coagulation. Research also suggests its importance in bone health — a deficiency is linked to greater risk of hip fracture and lower bone mass (*Nutr Rev* 2008;66:549-57).

Whole Foods for Optimal Health

Holiday meals can be a cornucopia of healthful foods to keep your body strong for whatever challenges the New Year may bring. Our chiropractic office works with patients to help them maintain the chiropractic lifestyle, a wellness-centered approach to health that encompasses nutrition, stress management exercise and more. To learn what chiropractic has to offer, make an appointment today for a consultation.



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