

Comfort Foods

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As the days grow shorter and the temperature dips, people naturally tend to crave warmer, richer, heavier foods. Indeed, while the idea of meatloaf, mashed potatoes and gravy seems downright absurd in the summer, rich foods such as these can be a welcome addition during chilly weather.

Craving high energy foods is our body's way of increasing the amount of calories that we consume in cold weather. Indeed, it is natural for our food choices to change with the seasons, eating lighter in the summer months and more heartily during the winter.

Yet while we do need some extra calories to help keep us humming through the colder months, fall can be a challenge for those looking to control their weight for several reasons. For one, shorter days can make exercise more difficult, and breezier temps can make it downright unpleasant if you are not fond of chilly weather. No exercise means that you are burning fewer calories, which means you need to watch your intake if you are going to keep your weight stable.

Secondly, with swimsuits and shorts being traded for sweatpants and sweaters, baggy waistlines tend to make it easier for the pounds to creep on. And while summer's abundance of produce make it easy to get your "5 A Day" servings of fruits and veggies, the paltry selection of fall and winter fare in the produce aisle can have you running for the bread and pastry departments in search of comfort foods.

Yet there are some ways to enjoy the rituals of fall without relapsing into old habits that encourage unhealthy eating and weight gain. Below are some tips to keep you fit and trim all season:

- **Winning breakfast options.** Steer clear of the cinnamon buns and breakfast pastries. Make oatmeal or other hot cereal and use skim or lowfat milk instead of water for added creaminess. Top whole grain waffles with lowfat yogurt and frozen berries for a warm treat that scores high nutrition points. Tuck two scrambled eggs into a whole wheat pita for a warm breakfast to go (you can add salsa for added vitamin C and antioxidants).
- **Plan for cold weather snack attacks** with hot pick-me-ups such as instant soup cups (just add hot water) or a tortilla rolled with beans and cheese and zapped in the microwave. Make a hot chocolate treat at home by heating skim milk with Hershey's syrup for another warming treat. A good rule of thumb when snacking is to make sure your snacks come from the five food groups as opposed to the "other" category such as sugary sweets, salty noshes or fatty fried options (aka junk food).



- **Trim the fat in comfort foods** by using the leanest cuts of meat possible; look for "lean" or "round" in the title, such as pork loin or top round. To save on fat use ground turkey or chicken for meatballs, and look for hamburger that is at least 90 percent lean. Use chicken broth, flavored vinegars, herbs and spices for flavoring in lieu of butter or cream. Lighten mashed potatoes by using lowfat milk and chicken broth instead of the traditional artery clogging heavy hitters such as butter, sour cream or cheese.
- **Look for new options.** Experiment with filling, warming meals that pack a nutrition punch such as vegetarian chili, bean soups and hearty vegetable stews. Pureed soups can give a creamy thickness without the fat, and served with a salad and whole wheat rolls or cornbread this can make a satisfying, stick to your bones meal.
- **Keep an exercise program going.** If you have been walking all fall but the cold weather has you staying indoors, plan another exercise that you can comfortably do, such as taking a yoga or kickboxing class, buying an exercise video, or enlisting a friend to walk briskly around the mall. Exercise is key to maintaining lean muscle tissue and cardiovascular fitness, and will help you burn those extra calories that you will likely be consuming.
- **Continue to set goals.** It is important to continue to have personal goals that will help to keep you motivated through the winter months. How do you want to feel when you wake up on January 1st of 2002? Get a jumpstart on your New Year's Resolutions by visualizing how you want to look, feel and behave this winter, then determine what behaviors you will have to change (or maintain) to get there.