

Balance is the key to a healthy diet

by: CARY ASPINWALL World Scene Writer
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It's almost time for our collective holiday hangover.

Too many feasts with rich comfort food, too many cocktail parties, too many presents made of sugar.

But don't start looking for quick fixes or skipping meals to make up for the damage, warns Christine Avanti, the nutrition director for the renowned Passages Malibu drug and alcohol treatment center.

Avanti, Los Angeles-based author of "Skinny Chicks Don't Eat Salads," said in a recent phone interview the key to getting healthy in the new year is to bring balance back to your diet.

"You have to heal your metabolism to burn fat, rather than destroying it more," she said. "It's like eating an ice cream sundae. It tastes great in your mouth for 30 seconds or so, but afterward you feel fat, bloated and gross. That's how quick fixes are in weight-loss world, too."

Avanti helps her celebrity clients focus on stabilizing their blood sugar and eating balanced meals. "You want a nice ratio of healthy carbohydrates, lean protein and healthy fats," she said. "It's good to have that balance in every meal, and it's good to eat foods like that every four hours throughout the day."

Eating smaller, more frequent meals helps keep blood sugar in check and prevent a blood sugar spike from excess calories - that eventually get stored as fat, she said.

The biggest mistake people make throughout the holidays, Avanti said, is skipping meals throughout the day so they can pig out at a party later that night.

"Not only will you overeat when you get there," she said, "but the hypoglycemia throughout the day causes caffeine and sugar cravings, and you put yourself at risk to be moody, loaded with anxiety, depressed and stressed out."

It's better to eat light meals throughout the day and even a small snack before you head to a party so you won't binge once you get to a celebration.

And make sure to get plenty of sleep in the new year, because sleeping at least seven to eight hours each night helps your metabolism function better.

"When you don't get enough sleep, your body releases cortisol, which helps keep weight on," she said.

Healthy party strategies

If you're trying to lose weight or improve your health, it's probably better to steer clear of alcohol if you can, Avanti said.

It's just empty calories that will likely be stored as fat, she said. Some popular holiday cocktails, such as egg nog, can pack as many as 250 to 500 calories per glass. If you skip these, you may save yourself from gaining an estimated 2-3 pounds of unwanted weight.

Opt for club soda with a splash of pomegranate juice, or hot apple cider instead.

Her personal favorites are hot flavored teas, which have almost no calories and come in festive flavors such as peppermint, chocolate truffle and pumpkin pie. Tea also contains the antioxidant EGCG, which is thought to elevate your metabolic rate, so it may be beneficial for weight loss.

If you want to celebrate the new year with a cocktail in moderation, try a glass of Prosecco with a splash of pomegranate juice, she said.

As for party snacks, just say no to the cheesy baked things and stick with dishes that incorporate fresh vegetables, like caprese salad served on appetizer skewers or ranch dip for fresh veggies made with nonfat Greek yogurt instead of mayonnaise.

Christine Avanti's recipe for a hearty soup with a mixture of healthy protein and carbs to help you eat lighter after weeks of indulging.

DAY-AFTER DETOX (CHIPOTLE-MUSHROOM) TURKEY SOUP WITH RICE

32 ounces chicken stock or broth
4 cups water
1 onion, diced
10 ounces cremini mushrooms, sliced
3 stalks celery, diced
1 cup carrots, diced
5 cloves garlic, minced
1 bay leaf
1 teaspoon thyme, chopped
2 teaspoons sea salt
2 teaspoons chipotles in adobo
1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 pound cooked leftover roasted turkey, or rotisserie chicken meat
1 cup brown rice, cooked
1/2 cup parsley, chopped
Lemon wedges for garnish

1. Combine first 13 ingredients in large pot. Bring to boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for about 20 minutes.
2. Add turkey and rice and simmer for 5 more minutes. Stir in fresh parsley. Season soup with sea salt and fresh cracked pepper.
3. Ladle soup into bowls. Sprinkle with fresh lemon juice and serve.

Nutrition per serving: 150 calories, 17 grams protein, 15 grams carbohydrates, 2 grams fat

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"You have to heal your metabolism to burn fat, rather than destroying it more," says Christine Avanti. "You want a nice ratio of healthy carbohydrates, lean protein and healthy fats." JAMES GIBBARD/Tulsa World file



Get back to healthy eating with this hearty mix of healthy protein and carbs. JAMES GIBBARD/Tulsa World



Steer clear of alcohol to avoid excess holiday weight. JAMES GIBBARD/Tulsa World



THE SKINNY

Christine Avanti: She's a fan of eating smaller, more frequent meals to keep blood sugar in check.