

Eat Up: Healthy Foods For The Fourth

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Most Independence Day parties include an all-American BBQ with friends and family members that doesn't necessarily bring health foods to mind.



But whether you are hosting your own party or attending one, you can stick to healthy options or even have a few of your favorite indulgences without derailing your diet.

Franci Cohen, a Brooklyn, New York exercise physiologist and certified nutritionist with a master's degree, says it's possible to eat healthy and still enjoy holiday parties.

"If you are going to a party at someone else's house, of course, you can't control the menu, but you can prepare for it," Cohen said. "If I'm going to a party, especially when I know I really like some of what the cook will be making, I eat small meals — made up of protein and fiber— in the hours before the party, then when I arrive, I'm not starving."

That way, she said you can have a burger or one or even two of your friend's luscious brownies, but you won't over indulge.

"I might start the morning off with a very small portion of oatmeal and an egg white; then later, I'll have a green apple and a small amount of peanut butter," Cohen said. "When you are full from healthier options, you are happy if you get to sample your favorites and don't feel deprived. It's important to eat every few hours before the party to keep yourself satisfied, but eat small portions. Try to stay away from carbs, then zero in on the food that you like at the party.

"You can find your own balance," she said. "If you love the salad dressing, then eat it, but choose chicken for your meat. I usually say to stay away from steak, but pepper steak isn't as bad. Don't put cheese on your burger and don't eat hot dogs."

If Cohen is throwing her own Fourth of July bash, she has a long list of healthy options — and her guests are none the wiser — like her Portabella Bun Chicken Avocado Burgers. The burger is almost carb-free, and the creamy avocado is disguised as mayo.

"If the party is at your own house, you can easily substitute for fats, oils and white sugar in all kinds of recipes, and nobody will notice," Cohen said. "Focus on the presentation — with nice colors and textures,

and everyone will go on and on about how wonderful it was and will be asking for the recipe. They don't even realize that it's a much healthier choice."

For example, when making tuna salad, she uses low-fat mayonnaise and includes color and texture with chopped cabbage and broccoli, and stirs in yellow gold raisins.

"People love my tuna salad," she said.

She makes wraps using collard greens, grilled red pepper pesto, and uses ingredients with natural sugars like apricots and other fruit.

She brought a friend's idea of strawberry shortcake from a 700-calorie dessert to one that is only about 80, by serving strawberries with a homemade flat cracker made with oats and topping it with whipped cream with lemon juice and lemon zest to add flavor.

"There are many things you can do to eat healthier, but still enjoy food," Cohen said. "You just have to be a little creative."

Cohen is also a personal trainer and exercise physiologist, and the creator of SPIDERBANDS, a total-body cardio resistance workout that leverages gravity and your bodyweight with other intense exercise modules such as rebounding, kickboxing and indoor cycling. She believes in a tough love approach to fitness and health, and says, "We all have our fitness wake-up call at some point in our lives and it can be a powerful catalyst for change, but don't try to change everything at once."

Visit www.francicohen.com for more information and ideas on fitness and nutrition.

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