COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND AT COLLEGE PARK
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE

FOOD, HEALTH, AND YOU

DECEMBER 1996

VOLUME 4 NUMBER 6

TIPS FOR HOLIDAY EATING

Just about everyone overeats on occasion, especially at holiday time. Although occasional lapses in willpower are no cause for concern if you ordinarily eat a healthy diet and are physically active during the year, here are some suggestions to help you avoid overeating during the holidays:

◆Plan ahead when you know you will be having a large meal. Eat lightly earlier in the day, so you can indulge a little more later on. However, don't leave the house feeling extremely hungry, because you will be more likely to overeat. Have an apple or other fiber-rich food before leaving—this will help you feel a little full, and lower the tendency to overindulge.

◆When it's time to eat, make careful choices—only eat foods that look good or that you don't get to have very often. If something does not look appetizing, ask yourself if it is worth the calories, especially if it is breaded, fried, or looks greasy.

◆At the buffet line, take only one serving of the foods you select and then walk away before eating, so you are less likely to immediately take a second helping. If possible, use a small plate so less food fits on it. Cut-up fresh vegetables such as cauliflower, broccoli, carrots, and celery are always good choices, but take small portions of the dip, especially if it is not made with low-fat ingredients.

◆Go easy on the alcohol, which is high in calories, especially when mixed with sweetened beverages. Alcohol also can stimulate your appetite and lower your inhibitions, making it easier to eat more. Instead of alcoholic beverages, try sparkling water with a twist of lemon or lime. Keep a glass in your hand—it may discourage a well-meaning host or hostess from continually asking if you need something more to eat or drink.

◆Don't be afraid of offending your hosts by refusing to take seconds, but do so tactfully. In fact, consider practicing what you plan to say, such as "my doctor says I have to watch my diet (or cholesterol)" or "that piece of pumpkin pie really looks delicious, but I simply can't eat another bite." If you are expected to take a second helping, you can avoid an awkward situation by having a small first helping. Don't worry about cleaning your plate—if you get full, just stop eating.

◆Try to focus on your friends or family, rather than on the food. Do a lot of socializing to distract yourself from eating. After finishing your meal, try to get someone to go for a walk with you. This allows you to burn off some calories while enjoying the company of others.

◆When you do the entertaining, you are in control of the menu. If you serve turkey, remember that white meat has less fat than dark meat. For dessert, consider fresh fruits or sorbets, instead of rich pies and cakes. There are many cookbooks containing recipes for delicious, low-fat, healthy foods.

Holiday *(continued on page 2)*

Holiday *(continued from page 1)*

◆If you know you are going to eat more during the holidays, try to be more physically active, so that the additional calories you eat are burned off by the extra calories expended while exercising. Physical activity also helps relieve stress, which often is a problem when families get together.

◆Set realistic goals. If you have been successful in losing weight, you may lose weight at a slower rate, not lose any at all, or even gain weight during the holidays. This should not deter you from your long-term goal, as you can continue your weight loss program after the holidays.

Since it takes about 3,500 extra calories of food to gain one additional pound of fat, it is unlikely that even a few large meals will result in a significant weight gain. Give yourself permission to enjoy holiday meals, but try extra hard to discipline yourself the week before the holiday, and return to your healthy lifestyle the day after.

Source: *The Physician and Sportsmedicine*. 1994. 22(11):25-26.■

NUTRITION MISINFORMATION
A Continuing Problem

Although interest in health and nutrition among consumers may be at an all-time high, much of the nutrition information consumers find in bookstores, hear on radio shows, or read in magazines is often false or misleading. Even the "information superhighway," or Internet, a popular and valuable resource, has its share of fraudulent health and nutrition information.

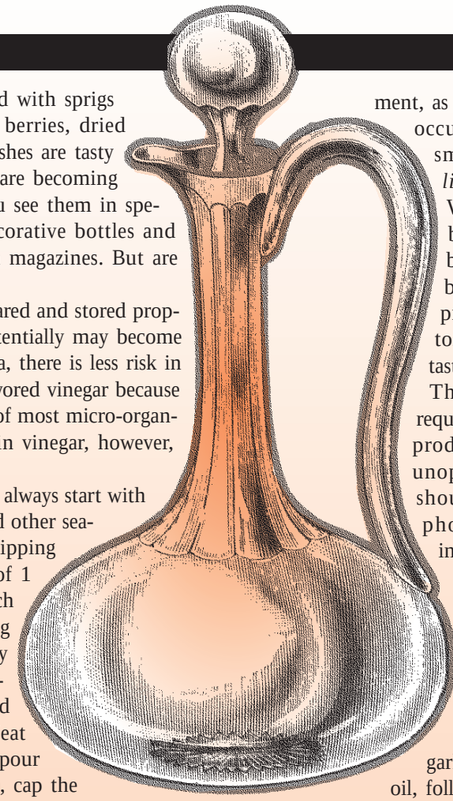
To help combat misinformation, a coalition of professionals concerned about the proliferation of reports that exaggerate and distort nutrition and other sciences issued a list of 10 "red flags" to help consumers spot "junk" science. Janet Hunt, Ph.D., R.D., chair of the Food and Nutrition Science Alliance (FANSA) says "Consumers can use these tips to evaluate reports on nutrition and health issues before jumping to premature conclusions." FANSA is a partnership of four professional societies representing 100,000 food scientists and food, nutrition, and medical practitioners who have joined forces to speak on timely food and nutrition issues. "Any combination of these signs should send up a red flag of suspicion about the accuracy of the information," Hunt says.

FANSA's 10 red flags of junk science are:

1. Recommendations that promise a quick fix.
2. Dire warnings of danger from a single product or regimen.
3. Claims that sound too good to be true.
4. Simplistic conclusions drawn from a complex study.
5. Recommendations based on a single study.
6. Dramatic statements that are refuted by reputable scientific organizations.
7. Lists of "good" and "bad" foods.
8. Recommendations made to help sell a product.
9. Recommendations based on studies published without peer review.
10. Recommendations from studies that ignore differences among individuals or groups.

"In the quest for better health, it can be tempting to reach for easy answers," Hunt adds. "This list is a reminder to look before you leap."

Source: FANSA News Release, September 29, 1995. FANSA represents members of the American Dietetic Association, American Institute of Nutrition, American Society for Clinical Nutrition, and the Institute of Food Technologists.



Vinegars and oils seasoned with sprigs of herbs, cloves, garlic, berries, dried tomatoes, or other garnishes are tasty and attractive gifts that are becoming increasingly popular. You see them in specialty food shops in decorative bottles and find recipes for them in magazines. But are these products safe?

Flavored vinegars and oils are safe if prepared and stored properly. Although both of these products potentially may become contaminated with disease-causing bacteria, there is less risk in developing a food-borne illness from a flavored vinegar because its high acid content prevents the growth of most micro-organisms. Since some organisms can survive in vinegar, however, certain precautions are necessary.

When making your own flavored vinegar, always start with clean seasonings and containers. Herbs and other seasonings can be safely cleaned by dipping for 1 to 2 minutes in a solution of 1 teaspoon of household chlorine bleach per 6 cups of water, and then rinsing in cold running water. Thoroughly wash the jars or bottles, and then sanitize by immersing in a pot of water and bringing to a boil for 10 minutes. Heat the vinegar to just below boiling and pour into the bottles. Then, add the garnish, cap the bottles, and store in a clean, cool place. Flavored vinegars take 3 to 4 weeks to develop their full flavor.

After the flavor is developed, discard the garnish and strain the vinegar through a damp cheesecloth or coffee filter one or more times until the vinegar looks clear. Pour the strained vinegar into clean, sanitized jars. Add a sprig or two of fresh herbs, berries, or other garnishes that have been sanitized as previously described. Seal tightly and store in the refrigerator. For the best flavor, use within 3 or 4 months.

Oils that are flavored with garlic or other seasonings may pose a serious health hazard if not properly prepared and refrigerated because they may become contaminated with dangerous *Clostridium botulinum* bacteria. *Clostridium botulinum* spores, a dormant form of the organism, are found naturally in the soil and therefore come into contact with garlic, herbs, and other plants. Although the spores are harmless in the presence of air, they can germinate, grow, and produce toxin in an oxygen-free environment, as exists in oil. Toxin production may occur in a flavored oil even if only a small number of *Clostridium botulinum* spores initially are present. When consumed, the toxin causes botulism, a disease characterized by blurred or double vision, speech and breathing difficulties, and sometimes progressive paralysis and death. The toxin does not necessarily affect the taste or smell of a food product.

The Food and Drug Administration requires that all commercial garlic-in-oil products be kept refrigerated, even if unopened. Commercial products also should contain preservatives such as phosphoric acid or citric acid that inhibit the growth of *Clostridium botulinum* and other microorganisms. However, some products sold in boutique and specialty shops may not contain these additives, which must be listed on the ingredient label.

If you prepare your own mixture of garlic-in-oil or other types of seasoned oil, follow the same procedures for sanitizing the bottles as described previously. Before adding the garnish, immerse it in a boiling mixture of 1 cup vinegar and 1 cup water for about 1 minute, pour through a strainer, and add the garnish to the oil without rinsing. This procedures acidifies the garnish, helping to prevent *Clostridium botulinum* from growing. The FDA recommends that homemade seasoned oils be used right away and then refrigerated; any leftover oil should be discarded after 10 days. Because cold temperature helps prevent the growth of micro-organisms that still may be present, it is best not to give seasoned oil as a gift unless you are confident that the recipient will keep the bottle refrigerated.

Source: Adapted from Pat Kendall, Ph.D., R.D., food science and human nutrition specialist, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension Service.■

FOLLOW SAFETY PRECAUTIONS WITH SEASONED VINEGARS AND OILS

MARVELOUS MORSELS

- Sales of soy foods increased 350 percent over the past decade, to about $1.4 billion in 1995.
- French fries account for nearly one-quarter of all the vegetables that children eat.
- Adults in the western states tend to exercise more than adults living in the rest of the country. In a recent survey, Oregon topped the list, with 36 percent of adults reporting regular activities such as walking, bicycling, and taking stairs instead of elevators. Washington, D.C. came in last, with only 16 percent of adults reporting sufficient physical activity.
- According to the National Restaurant Association, the typical American spends about $130 each year on fast food hamburgers, making it the most popular fast food choice.
- The percentage of overweight children in the U.S. has doubled in the past 20 years. Nearly 5 million youths between the ages of 6 and 17 are now overweight, which is 11 percent of all children in that age group. The chief reason is lack of exercise.

Food, Health, and You is published bimonthly by the Cooperative Extension Service, University of Maryland at College Park and University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

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Address comments about this newsletter to Food, Health, and You, Department of Nutrition and Food Science, 3306 Marie Mount Hall, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. Kindly direct questions on specific food and nutrition topics to your county Extension office.

If you do not receive this newsletter by mail and would like to, contact your county or Baltimore City Extension office. For information on upcoming programs on food and nutrition, or to arrange a program for your group or organization, contact your Extension home economics agent. Phone numbers of Extension offices are listed on page 4 of this issue.

FOOD, HEALTH, AND YOU

Q: Is it safe to drink iced tea served in restaurants?

A: Yes. Although recent stories in the media implied that the contamination of iced tea with "fecal bacteria" was widespread, many such reports were misleading. Scientists detected only harmless bacteria commonly found on plants, and there was no evidence that iced tea was a health hazard. Potentially dangerous *E. coli* bacteria, which are associated with fecal contamination of food, were not found in any sample. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has not documented a single confirmed outbreak of a food-borne illness from iced tea in the past 20 years. Although the bacteria found in tea were not pathogenic, their presence in some samples indicated poor sanitary practices. Bacterial levels can be reduced by making tea with boiling water, refrigerator storage, and routinely cleaning the tea urn and spigot.

EXTENSION CORNER

- Take a fitness and learning break at the Weight Off Wisely (WOW) weekend, February 7-9, at the Ramada Inn in Hagerstown. Learn about nutrition and health and participate in low-impact and water aerobics, line dancing, and other fun activities. No experience necessary. The $150 cost covers lodging and all meals and snacks. To register, or for more information, please call the Calvert, Cecil, or Frederick County Extension offices.
- A 6-hour training course for child care providers will be held Saturday, February 15, from 8:30 a.m.-3:15 p.m., at St. Paul's Methodist Church in Cambridge, Maryland. For details, please call the Dorchester or Caroline County Extension offices.
- The Calvert County Extension Service will offer three "Lunch and Learn" classes, February 6, 13, and 20, from noon-1 p.m. at the County Services Plaza Building in Prince Frederick. Bring a bag lunch (beverages provided) and learn about nutrition and cancer prevention, weight control, and other timely topics. To preregister, please call (410) 535-3662 or (301) 855-1150. The cost is $1 per person.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30,1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, University of Maryland at College Park, and local governments. Thomas A. Fretz, Director of Cooperative Extension Service, University of Maryland at College Park.

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