


## Consuming Thoughts

by  
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The holidays probably wouldn't be half as exciting to kids if special foods and treats weren't served. But hectic schedules, disrupted routines and holiday feasts high in fat and sugar can all add up to less than favorable nutrition for children.

It's important for parents to remind their children that holidays are temporary and that normalcy will again reign, even at dinnertime. During the holidays, parents should make sure their youngsters are still offered a variety of nutritious foods to choose from for both meals and snacks.

Battles over eating that often occur at holiday time only increase frustrations and negative feelings about mealtime for both parent and child. The child will ultimately make the final deci-

sion on what he/she will actually eat.

Children, particularly preschoolers, tend to self-regulate their eating patterns and food choices. When it seems all they're consuming one day is sweets and sodas, it often happens that the next day they could care less about these foods. Parents should begin to worry only when their children choose sweets so many days in a row.

As a parent, you can take several steps to curb poor food intake and overcome food battles without depriving your offspring of the festive food they've waited for since last year. Here are some examples:

- While many holiday sweets are used decoratively, keep them out sparingly. (Cookies seen and

within reach are usually eaten more often.) Likewise, keep candy under wrap. Bring out these sweets at deliberate times should you choose to serve them as part of your holiday celebrations. Do not allow your kids to eat them all day long.

- Look at the spectrum of sweet food choices and resist the extremes. Hard candy is pure sugar; chocolate candy is mostly sugar and fat. Puddings, custards and frozen desserts, although still high in sugar and milk-fat, can provide a child's daily protein and calcium intake.

Most baked goods contain a lot of butter or fat and some sugar. Although they may also contain eggs and milk, it's usually in small amounts. Use whole grain flour whenever possible when making these items.

Make hot cocoa with low-fat milk and garnish it with one low-fat marshmallow instead of gobs of sweetened whipped

cream. (Better yet, dispense with the garnish.)

When you prepare these special foods, it can also be a learning opportunity for children. Talk to them about sugar, fat and salt as you add them to favorite recipes. Be sure to note the nutrients provided by fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals, lower fat dairy foods and lean meats and fish.

- Introduce some new "holiday treats" that bear nutrition in disguise. Mix unprocessed peanut butter with nonfat dry milk, a little honey, quick cooking oatmeal and raisins. Fold in a little shredded coconut or a small amount of sugar for a festive look.

- Try an array of fresh cut up

veggies and serve them with a yogurt-dill dip. Substitute a lower-fat sponge or angel food cake for butter-laden sweets and serve with mounds of fresh cut up fruit.

- Avoid using desserts as a reward during the holiday or at any other time. Kids may begin to attach undue importance to dessert rather than nutritious foods.

As parents, you can command the foods you make available to your child. You don't need to cook and serve foods high in salt, fat, and sugar. Those occasional and temporary indulgences by your children won't become permanent food patterns, especially if you set the standard of moderation in all festive foods.

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