

Creating healthy Christmas meals

For many people across the world, Christmas means reuniting with family, friends and loved ones to share stories and eat till 'belly buss'.

Are you really planning to defeat the New Year's resolution that was made 11 months ago to lose weight and make healthy food choices for health and strength in 2015? No, I didn't think so. What is on your menu for the festive season? As a child, I remember looking forward to having things like curried goat, oxtail, roasted and escoveitched fish, liver, chocolate tea, chicken (from the neighbour's coop), sorrel, mannish water, and my very favourites - Christmas cake, 'bottle drinks' (soda), and ice cream. As I got older, I found out about roasted pork, ham, conch, cow cod, and shrimp soup. Mmmmmmmmm? What will be on your table this year? Let us not go against the little vows we made on New Year's Day. We can still enjoy the meals and snacks this Christmas, but let's be healthy about it. During this time, foods that are rich in calories, sodium (salt), and fat are usually the preferred items. We skip the vegetables, fruits, and water until sometime in January when we realise that the clothes do not fit the same way - they shrunk. Here are some tips to create healthy, economical and appetising meals. Plan your menus for the festive season based on the following:

- Your budget, not based on what your friends are buying.
- The equipment or utensils already in your kitchen. There is really no need to purchase special equipment to prepare one dish.
- Maintaining your health and the health of those who will be partaking in the meals you prepare. Choose foods that are:
 - Low in fat or make them lower in fat during preparation. Remove skin and visible fat from beef, pork, ham, chicken, oxtail, goat meat, and even pig's tail. Fatter cuts of meat are usually less expensive - let us not be penny wise and pound foolish.
 - Low in sodium and salt. Processed and smoked foods are usually loaded with salt, such as salt mackerel, salt fish, pig's tail, ham, sausages/frankfurters, canned vegetables and most non-meat or vegetarian entrees. Choose fresh or frozen vegetables, peas, and beans, fresh cuts of meat or fish. If the processed food is chosen, consume less.
 - Low in sugar or concentrated sweets. Use less sugar, honey, syrup, or molasses when preparing various dishes, especially the sorrel, cake, pudding, egg nog, punch with or without rum. These foods are usually consumed in abundance - every time you take a break or enter the house or you see someone entering the house.
 - High in fibre. These include raw vegetables, fresh fruits (in season), whole grains, peas, and beans. Fibre-rich foods will fill us up quickly, causing us to eat less and trap the fat and cholesterol and other substances in the intestines and remove them from the body in our faeces.

Making healthy yet economical food choices in the festive season will show discipline, determination and readiness for 2016. Here's to your health this Christmas!