

THE YEAR-END FESTIVE season can be a constant round of feasting and dinner parties. Popular votes for the centrepiece usually go to roast beef, leg of lamb, glazed ham — and, of course — the perennial favourite: roast turkey.

Red vs White

A turkey done well impresses, both visually and taste-wise (see sidebar for tips). What's more, it has a nutritional edge over red meats like beef or lamb. Red meats contain higher levels of fat, especially saturated fat. Turkey, a white meat, is a good source of lean protein and vitamin B complex. Nutritionally, it is pretty much on par with chicken (eaten without skin): low in saturated fat and cholesterol. A serving of turkey breast meat — about one and a half slices — provides about two per cent of the daily calories an average person needs (based on 2,000 calorie diet); 11 per cent of protein; and just one per cent of total fat.

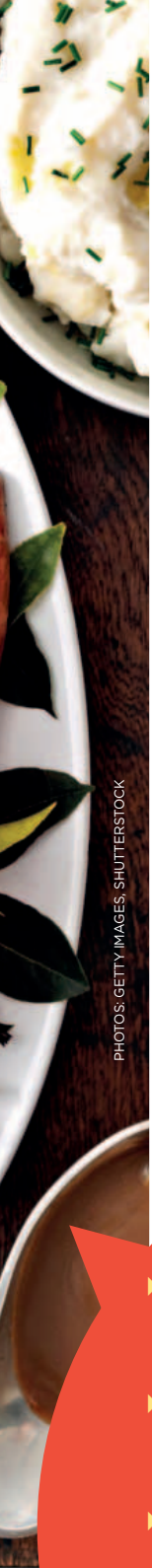
However, Ms Bonnie Lau, Dietitian, Department of Nutrition & Dietetics at Tan Tock Seng Hospital warns against eating too much turkey skin (a source of saturated fat). Doing so can increase blood cholesterol. Her advice: prepare the turkey with spices, herbs, dried fruits, nuts and a variety of vegetables for a balanced meal.

YES, YOU CAN STILL KEEP WITH TRADITION BUT IN A HEALTHY YET HEARTY WAY.

BY **CHIA EE KHIM** IN CONSULTATION WITH **MS ESTONIE YUEN** SENIOR DIETITIAN // NATIONAL HEALTHCARE GROUP POLYCLINICS AND **MS BONNIE LAU** DIETITIAN // DEPARTMENT OF NUTRITION & DIETETICS // TAN TOCK SENG HOSPITAL

Let's Talk TURKEY





PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES, SHUTTERSTOCK

In Control

To prevent over-eating, Ms Estonie Yuen, Senior Dietitian, National Healthcare Group Polyclinics recommends portion control. “Adjust your intake of festive treats by using small plates and putting just a small amount on your plate,” she says.

Ms Yuen also suggests doing away with store-bought gravy and cranberry sauce, the usual accompaniments to roast turkey. Gravy is generally high in fat and sodium. While cranberries contain high amounts of vitamins A, C, E and K as well as fibre, the fruit would have been boiled in sugared water to make the sauce. Half a cup of cranberry sauce contains 50g of sugar.

If you insist on cranberry sauce, make your own by cooking fresh cranberries with healthier ingredients such as slivered almonds, orange juice, orange zest, ginger or cinnamon. The Internet provides many recipes for lighter, healthier versions of this sauce.

Omitting the stuffing — which contains mostly bread and fat — is another way to make your turkey

TIPS

ON COOKING TURKEY

Ms Bonnie Lau gives the following tips:

- ▶▶ To cook the bird: Allow 45 minutes per kg plus 20 minutes for a bird under 4.5kg; 40 minutes per kg for one that’s 4.5kg–6.5kg; 35 minutes per kg for a bird more than 6.5kg.
- ▶▶ When thawing the turkey, note that the “danger zone” for thawing is between 5°C and 60°C, the temperature range when foodborne bacteria multiply rapidly.
- ▶▶ It is safe to thaw the bird in the refrigerator, in cold water and in a microwave oven.
- ▶▶ Pre-heat the oven for 20 minutes to 180°C.
- ▶▶ Place the turkey breast-side down on a big tray with room to spare. Add a cup of water to the tray. Halfway through cooking, turn the turkey over.
- ▶▶ About 30 minutes before cooking time is up, insert a meat thermometer into the thickest part of the breast, innermost part of the thigh and wing. The temperature there should be above 75°C.

The Other White Meat

If you don’t fancy turkey or roast chicken, try fish. Italian-Americans celebrate the Feast of the Seven Fishes during Christmas, where traditionally seven types of fish dishes are served. Instead of fish, some families serve seven types of seafood. You can stick to one type of fish, like salmon or cod, and grill or roast them. That way, you can satisfy your meat cravings and still be healthy and happy.



dish less calorie-laden. Instead, roast vegetables in the oven as a guilt-free side dish.

In any case, the festive season is a good time to get into the habit of eating delicious and healthy fare. Says Ms Yuen, “Opt for less meat, more vegetables. It is all about making healthier food choices. Moderation is key.” **LW**

NAUGHTY vs Nice
DITCH CALORIE-LOADED TREATS FOR HEALTHIER ONES THAT ARE JUST AS YUMMY.

 Potato chips	 Nuts
 Fruitcake	 Fresh fruit
 Candy cane	 Dried fruits

Potato chips are high in calories and salt. Depending on size, 11 to 13 salted chips weigh 23g and has 154 calories. Consider serving roasted nuts like almond, cashew, hazelnuts, macadamias or pistachios.

Fruitcake is packed with candied fruit, and contains a lot of sugar, butter and alcohol. Instead, serve fresh fruit as a snack or dessert.

If you **have** to have sweets and chocolate, satisfy your craving with dried fruits like cranberry or dried apricot.

Candy cane

Dried fruits

THE RULE OF THUMB is, if you must have snacks for your Christmas parties, choose healthier snacks and eat in moderation.