

# The Examiner

MEDIA

SMALL NEWS IS BIG NEWS

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## Guest Column

### Healthy Holiday Food Swaps to Support Elder Nutrition

By Jennifer Brullo

Ask anyone who's ever tried to make a drastic diet change: the switch from junk food to healthier, more nutritious alternatives is difficult and cannot happen overnight.

Anyone who grows accustomed to a high-fat, high-salt and high-sugar diet will inevitably set themselves up for failure (and cravings) if they quit unhealthy eating "cold turkey." Mix in the holiday season – treats, trimmings and all – and you've got a recipe for nutritional upheaval.

It's easy to fret about the upcoming holiday menu if you care for an elderly loved one who manages chronic medical conditions or simply needs to keep an eye on what they eat. As a registered nurse at Partners in Care, I communicate often with concerned family caregivers while providing care for their loved ones at home. During the holiday season, two pieces of advice often arise – facilitate incremental changes in your loved one's diet, giving them a chance to get used to each change before making a new one, and don't skip out on holiday treats but moderate.

Here are some suggestions for healthier versions of favorite celebratory dishes.

**No need to "uproot tastiness."** Did you know that one cup of mashed potatoes made with butter and whole milk contains about 240 calories, nine grams of fat and 35 grams of carbohydrates? With all their flavor and creamy, rich texture, mashed potatoes may seem like a holiday staple, but there is a healthy alternative growing in popularity that is

sure to be just as popular at your holiday dinner: mashed cauliflower. The mashed vegetable has the same texture and similar flavor and is loaded with Vitamin C.

**No-fry zone.** Love plantains? You're not alone. The vitamin A-, potassium-packed veggie is omnipresent in Puerto Rican cooking. While you can't eat these starchy bananas raw, always avoid frying or mashing them. Instead, save calories and cholesterol by eating them baked or even boiled.

**Dip on some dips.** Skip the high-sodium dips and the crisp-fried and salty chips. Greek yogurt and hummus are delicious and much healthier substitutes for mayonnaise, sour cream and cream cheese dips, all of which negate the power of veggies that the dips may include. On the chip front, try switching it with your favorite vegetable. If carrots or celery sticks don't appeal, try bell pepper strips, broccoli florets or grape tomatoes.

**It's easy being green.** The bad news is that the traditional green bean casserole found on so many "favorites" lists, despite its name, is mostly made from overly processed foods that are high in sodium and fat. The good news? There are delicious alternatives to getting creative and cooking greens. In fact, some greens should be simmered or sautéed for the best flavor and nutrition. Many of these are at their best in the winter. (Frost makes them sweeter and more tender.) Kale and collards, in addition to brussels sprouts, cauliflower and broccoli, are all high in sulfur compounds that provide many health benefits and taste best

roasted.

**'Tis the season for seasonings.** In Latin cooking, food is highly seasoned – but not necessarily salty or spicy. Take, for instance the popular dish sofrito (also popular in Spanish, Italian and Portuguese cooking), which is made from tomatoes, peppers, onions, garlic and cilantro and is used in dishes from rice to seafood. Adding seasonings and skipping salt to add flavor to your favorites will still taste delicious and your heart will thank you.

**Skip the cake but have pumpkin pie.** When it comes to cookies, cakes and pastries, you face the double-whammy of sugar and trans fats. Trans fats can raise cholesterol and put you at risk for heart disease and diabetes, so do your loved one a favor and skip the cake – and most pies – for a (surprisingly) healthier alternative: pumpkin pie. Because the seasonal favorite is missing the top layer that most pies have, it is lower in saturated fats. For an even more nutritious alternative, try instead making the pie crust from dates and nuts and eliminating butter altogether.

For year-round recipe ideas, check out this Caregiver's Cookbook: [https://www.vnsny.org/article\\_category/caregivers-cookbook](https://www.vnsny.org/article_category/caregivers-cookbook).

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