

Healthy Steps to Surviving the Holidays

Ready or not, we're about to begin the annual holiday feeding frenzy, otherwise known as temptation time.

Unfortunately, between Thanksgiving's turkey with all the trimmings and New Year's Eve toasts, the average person gains up to five pounds.

"With nearly a third of California children already overweight, Salinas's schools need to start setting a better example by beginning to institute healthier fundraisers," says Sarah Bartelmann, Monterey County Health Department School Coordinator.

This year, the Steps to a Healthier Salinas program, which is always looking out for your best health, has these suggestions for some small steps you can take to ensure that you enjoy yourself without having to loosen your belt.

- Remember that holiday time is about family and friends, not about the food and feasting. This is an opportunity to socialize and check in with family members you haven't seen in a while or meet some new people. So, instead of filling silences at holiday parties with numerous trips to the buffet table, look for someone interesting to talk to and strike up a conversation. Conversation is calorie free!

- Don't go to holiday parties hungry. The biggest mistake people can make is starving all day to save up calories to binge eat at a party. Instead, eat a nutritious snack before you go because hunger can undo the best intentions. Have low-fat trail mix, a piece of fruit, a bowl of consommé or other clear soup, yogurt, or cut-up jicama strips, carrots, radishes or other crunchy vegetables. That way you'll be satisfied when you get to the party and happy to enjoy smaller portions of food.

- Eat in moderation. Since this is the season of bountiful buffets, the strategy to managing what you eat is to plan ahead. To help yourself resolve, use small plates.

Serve yourself appetizer-size por-

tions of only one or two things at a time. If possible, eat in a different room or as far away from the lure of the buffet table as possible. Wait at least 15 minutes before going back for more food.

- Offer to bring a nutritious dish to holiday parties, such as fresh vegetables or a low-fat dip. That way you'll know that there will be at least one healthy option.

- Plan ahead for one small indulgence a day, and really enjoy it. Practice eating slowly and savor the flavors, rather than gobbling things down and running back for more.

- Drink lots of water. If you are invited to a cocktail party, drink a tall glass of water before you go and enjoy refreshing glasses of water between high-calorie beverages. If you are hosting the party, be sure to stock the cooler with plenty of water or low-calorie, non-alcoholic beverages. Warm mulled cider or low-fat eggnog are other great holiday alternatives.

- Holiday gift, a big box of candy, for example, take it to work and share it with your colleagues. If your break room is filled with an endless variety of sweets, don't hang out there.

- Don't overdo the calories with holiday cookies. Instead of baking many different cookie recipes this year, make one kind and serve a variety of cut-up fresh fruit along with the cookies.

- Prepare for holiday travel. If you are traveling this holiday season, stop off at the grocery store to pick up some healthy snacks before you go so you'll be less tempted by unhealthy options along the way.

- Schedule time to be active. Luckily Salinas has great weather all year round. Enjoy an energetic walk after holiday meals or parties to look at the holiday decorations. Invite family and friends to a friendly game of soccer or basketball, or to join you for a bike ride. Exercise is a great stress reducer, especially during the holiday season. ■

School Fundraising Can Be Healthy

It's time to stop selling our children's health for a quick buck.

The Steps to a Healthier Salinas program warns that seemingly innocent fundraisers such as candy and cookie sales send the wrong message to children and their parents.

"With nearly a third of California children already overweight, Salinas's schools need to start setting a better example by beginning to institute healthier fundraisers," says Sarah Bartelmann, Monterey County Health Department School Coordinator.

According to Bartelmann, there are endless possibilities for healthy

fundraisers. Here are some to help raise money for schools:

- Sponsor a parent-child or parents-versus-teachers soccer tournament. Some schools have made a lot of money sponsoring celebrity basketball games with elected officials, local DJs and city leaders fighting for the hoops.

- Organize a Read-a-Thon where children get sponsors and raise money for reading. The more books they read, the more money they raise, and everyone wins.

- Walk-a-Thons, Bike-a-Thons and Jog-a-Thons are all healthy ways to raise funds while promoting fun physical activity. Loma Vista Elementary School held a successful Jump-a-Thon in October.

- School festivals, carnivals, school dances or car washes can all be profitable while provid-

ing healthy fun for the whole family.

- Science or health fairs are other great ways to raise needed funds while building community.

- Organize a school raffle where the high ticket item is a one-of-a-kind quilt with individual squares designed by children or raffle off a number of items at an all-school auction.

- School plays, talent shows, musical reviews and spelling bees are other ideas that provide an opportunity to showcase the school's talented students.

- Organize an all-school flea market or white elephant sale.

Here are some ideas for things to sell in lieu of unhealthy foods:

- Offer healthy foods such as low-fat trail mix, water and 100-percent fruit juice or fruit smooth-

ies instead of candy and soda.

- Consider selling bouquets of flowers, greeting cards, wrapping paper and ribbons or flower bulbs.

- Schools can also sell bumper stickers, school spirit items, mugs, activity and coupon books, and magazine subscriptions.

- Several companies offer a fruit-of-the-month club just for schools.

- Other ideas include: emergency kits for cars and first aid kits

For more ideas about healthy fundraising in your school or community, check out www.actionforhealthykids.org and www.nojunkfood.org. For additional information on Steps to a Healthier Salinas, visit www.stepsstohealthiersalinas.org or call us at (831) 755-4614. ■

The Face of Food on the Central Coast

Over the past year, the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) completed a participatory study of local food issues on the Central Coast, which is documented in a community food assessment report, *The Face of Food on the Central Coast*.

The project was based on focus group and field research, and concludes with current and recommended efforts to address food access inequities.

Community Food Assessments are being used across the country by a wide variety of organizations to help understand issues affecting a local food system. ALBA's assessment was designed to explore the production, distribution and consumption patterns of local produce. Clearly, in the Salinas community, with its wealth of fresh produce, there is much overlap between these sectors.

However, there are some ironies in our local food system. Monterey County may produce much of the nation's fresh vegetable supply, but often farm workers and other low-income people do not consume the healthy food produced here. Farm workers are commonly overlooked as a consumer group. Typically the poorest neighborhoods have the fewest options for food purchase, and too often the products that stand out on local shelves are not healthy. In Salinas this takes on even more significance given the abundance of fresh foods grown and processed here. This abundance can generate a wealth of healthful eating options for everyone.

Nationwide, there is a growing demand for fresh, local produce – grown and sold directly to the public by small- and medium-sized farmers. Locally grown is a rallying call, and consumers are responding. The number of farmers' markets nationwide doubled from 1994 to 2004. The popularity of Web sites such as www.localharvest.com is skyrocketing. Even in the more northern climes, there is a growing network of farmers creating networks that support regional food economies.

The primary objective of the Community Food Assessment was to determine if there are markets for local, organic produce among the low-income communities of the Salinas Valley. Based on the results of this market-driven assessment, there are strong indications that all types of consumers understand the importance of supporting local and organic food purchases, and there is demand for better access to local produce – fruits and vegetables with a source-verified origin, often sold by or identified with the person who grew it.

Through the assessment, we found that very little local, organic produce is available in retail grocery stores in the Salinas Valley, nor are items that are available labeled or marketed clearly or aggressively. However, we learned that low-income as well as middle-class consumers are interested in buying local and organic products, especially under the following conditions: when these products are available where they normally shop and if they are perceived as affordable.

The solution to community food security can only be found by a multifaceted cross-sector approach that includes the health sector, agriculture producers, land-use planners, economic development and social

justice. Increasingly people understand that a community's environment and the choices it makes available, and not solely personal preferences, drive many dietary decisions. *The Face of Food on the Central Coast* explores the food system issues of our local community and seeks ways to bridge the gap of injustice. Together, the many groups that work hard to address these issues will unite to help foster long-term solutions to the problems of our food system.

There are many exciting steps under way to bring about a more vibrant local foods' economy that result in better health and nutrition among all citizens. Over the past summer, many local farmers and consumers have benefited from the Oldtown Salinas Marketplace, a Saturday farmers' market. Local farmers have also been part of a farm stand hosted by Sacred Heart Parish, enabling churchgoers to bring local produce home for Sunday dinner. Community-supported agriculture programs are also growing – local farmers deliver diverse produce boxes to families on a weekly basis. Companies such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium and Pebble Beach Company are hosting such programs for the convenience of their employees.

The Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) is a non-profit organization working to advance economic viability, social equity and ecological land management among limited-resource and aspiring farmers. It is a partner in the Steps to a Healthier Salinas program. If you are interested in learning more about ALBA's work or would like to receive a copy of *The Face of Food on the Central Coast* report, please contact ALBA at (831) 758-1469 or visit www.albafarmers.org. ■