Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: The holidays present us with an abundance of food, so it's easy to overeat. To avoid eating too much and packing on extra pounds, it's helpful to make a plan and stick with it. I'm Emily Yeap.

Here with me today to offer tips and advice about eating healthy this holiday season is Natalie Allen. She's a registered dietician and clinical instructor of biomedical sciences at Missouri State University.

Natalie Allen: This is a time when probably weight loss isn't going to happen, but make your goal to maintain your weight and to maintain some activity level just to keep your stress down, help you feel better and keep the pounds off.

Emily Yeap: Be selective about what you consume at a holiday meal. Eat the foods you absolutely love.

Natalie Allen: The key at the holidays is to think, "What food can I not live without?" Is it your grandma's pie? Is it your mom's mashed potatoes? Is it your famous turkey? Then certainly you want to eat some of that. No problem. But look at other foods that maybe you don't love or that don't mean as much to you and avoid those.

 Also, places where calories are hiding are things like sauces, gravies, creamy things, and then drinks. Alcoholic drinks add up calorie-wise and so do creamy drinks like eggnog. It's not that you can't have them, but it's easy to drink several hundred calories in a liquid, and that doesn't really provide you any fullness or much nutrition.

Emily Yeap: Try not to skip meals before a party or holiday dinner.

Natalie Allen: One thing to think about on the holidays is don't save up for the big event because you're more likely to overeat when you go. If you have a party you are going to at night, certainly still eat breakfast and lunch. Maybe eat a little bit lighter, choose more fruits and vegetables at those meals, so you can have more calories and indulge a little bit more later. But don't not eat all day, and then go to the party because that's going to lead to you eating way more calories than you would have. Plus it's just not good for you.

Emily Yeap: If you're going to a lot of holiday parties, Allen suggests bringing along a healthy dish.

Natalie Allen: It doesn't have to be the veggie or the fruit tray. Think outside the box. There are all kinds of great things you could certainly do like a black bean salsa with

corn, red peppers and green peppers. That would look Christmassy or holiday-ish. That's a great option as far as nutrition.

 Carry your own water if you need to while you're there. Alternate it with a drink that has calories. If you bring a dessert, cut it into bite-size portions. People generally don't need big amounts of things. Portion things out before you go. If you're going to make salad, put it in little individualized cups already. People are more likely to choose that, and it's already in a good half-cup portion size.

Emily Yeap: When faced with a buffet spread, follow this advice.

Natalie Allen: Your first round of the buffet, fill up with things that maybe aren't as calorically dense. Get a little bit of food in you. Then go back and choose things that maybe you don't take as much of, things that have a lot of calories. Then, of course, it's very normal to have dessert.

Emily Yeap: When it comes to traditions, incorporate things that revolve around more than just food.

Natalie Allen: Think about traditions that you have in your family, things that maybe mean a lot to you that revolve around food. Keep doing those, but add in some things that might be perhaps not as food-based. For example, in my family, I make cinnamon rolls every Christmas morning. We all eat those because they're good, and that's part of our tradition.

 Another part of a tradition could be you play a game together, you take a walk together, or you watch a movie. Something that isn't as food-based, so you have a balance of traditions and healthy, happy things for your family.

Emily Yeap: While you should be aware of what you're eating, don't get too stressed out about it. Instead, relax, celebrate and enjoy yourself.

Natalie Allen: I think the main thing at the holiday, as far as nutrition and health is, don't feel bad. Don't feel guilty. Eat the things you enjoy, and then get back on track in the new year.

Emily Yeap: That was Natalie Allen, registered dietitian and clinical instructor of biomedical sciences at MSU. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

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