Memorial Day Weekend and Summer Months Healthier Eating Tips and Snack Ideas

By Chef Jen Muzzi, RDN/LDN, RYT-200

Memorial Day marks the “unofficial/official” start to the summer. With the warmer weather, more grilling and on-the-go foods are consumed. How do we make these a little healthier? While there is NOTHING WRONG with enjoying the occasional hot dog, hamburger, steak or chicken off the grill, it’s important to remember to keep these items in moderation. There are studies that link cured, smoked and charred meats to some cancers. Research hasn’t yet proven that it’s the CAUSE of cancer. But, it’s best to err on the side of caution and remember to enjoy these foods in moderation.

With that PSA out of the way, here’s some ways to enjoy the healthier side of the summer.

1- EAT FRUIT!! Watermelon, cantaloupe and strawberries are great sources of vitamins, minerals, fiber AND hydration. Check out last year’s blog and recipes on Foods that Hydrate.

2- Grill your vegetables and salad- Yes, I said grill your salad! Do you remember last year’s Grilled Romaine Salad recipe? The bonus of grilling vegetables is that is doesn’t produce carcinogens. Other veggies that are easy to grill are:
  - asparagus
  - corn on the cob
  - sliced eggplant
  - sliced zucchini and summer squashes.

For a healthy dessert- try grilled pineapple. TRUST YOUR CHEF DIETITIAN, these all taste great on the grill!

3- Packing a picnic or going to a party? Why not bring a tray of these delicious Whole Wheat Brownies? Whole wheat provides fiber and minerals and it doesn’t make these overly dense as whole wheat sometimes can. Also, the classic homemade Rice Krispie’s treat is lower in fat and easy to make on the stove-top. You can add ¼ cup peanut butter in to boost protein or add in ¼ cup chopped dried apricots for fiber. It’s fun to get the kids involved with making this recipe. Try using cookie cutters for fun shapes as well.

4- “On-the-go” or “on-the-beach/boat” or “in-the-mountains” snacking ideas are:
  - homemade granola
  - easy trail mix
  - Nut butter sandwich logs
  - Fresh & in season fruit
  - carrots, sliced bell peppers or sliced cucumbers and hummus (cooler required for these)
nibs of any kind

5- Hot dogs—the conundrum... beef, pork, poultry or mixed? Cured or Uncured? Here’s the facts:

- Beef is higher in saturated fat.
- Cured vs uncured: “Uncured” is a fairly new marketing label added because there is a higher “consumer demand for less nitrates”. Usually, “cured” is added chemical sodium nitrate, but celery juice is a “natural” way to create nitrates. The manufacturers use celery juice that is in a bacteria culture that causes a reaction to make nitrates. To find out more info on nitrates and celery juice, click on this link for quick read.
- The hot dogs are processed meats that are likely smoked, making them higher in sodium.

It’s your option to choose which you prefer the best. But all of these reasons are why hot dogs and processed meats should be eaten in moderation and infrequently.

Here are my suggestions for hot dogs:

- Applegate Natural Uncured Turkey Hot Dogs- 450 mg sodium and 0.5 gm saturated fat per hot dog.
- Aldi’s Parkview Uncured Turkey Franks with 430 mg sodium and 1.5 gm saturated fat per hot dog. These do contain cultured celery juice but are also smoked.
- If you prefer beef, then select Hebrew National’s 97% fat free beef franks- 490 mg sodium and 0.5 gm saturated fat per hot dog. (Just be aware that those do contain added sodium nitrates.

I hope that you all get to enjoy this summer as we slowly start to make it back to as close to normal as we can.

Be Well, Eat Well, Live Well & Bon Appetit!

~~Chef Jen