

7 Tips to Eating Well During Fall and Winter

By Bill Bradley, Registered Dietitian and Cookbook Author

So far this week I have heard the bitter sweet sound of feet crunching their way through Autumn leaves, the smell of woodstove smoke wafting in the air and the sounds of people sniffing from “change of season” allergies and colds. Every year it feels like summer turns to fall in a flash and suddenly it is dark at 5 and we feel tired and want to go to bed much earlier.

For me, it is also the time when I begin to crave heavier foods, going from choosing light summer salads, sautéed zucchini and chicken or fish to desiring meat, potatoes, butternut squash and eggplant parmesan. It is natural for us to want heavier, fattier foods as winter comes. The only problem is that most of us are not gathering wood for our wood stove or bringing in the fall harvest. We often end up eating heavier foods with more calories while at the same time we are slowing down, spending more time indoors, having holiday parties and generally hibernating into the Netflix cave.

Here are some tips on how to continue to eat well during Fall and Winter:

Make it Veggie-ful

It is common to eat fewer vegetables during the winter months because they are not as plentiful. However, you will feel a lot better if you continue to eat them even when it gets cold. I try to get at least one serving of greens every day throughout the year whether they are raw or cooked. Keep eating garlic year around as it is great for your immune system and can help ward off colds. Even if I have winter squash and/or potatoes, I still like to eat another vegetable with my meal such as a salad or a lighter cooked vegetable like broccoli or spinach.

Enjoy Fruits and Dark Chocolate as Your Sweets

You can observe a pattern of overeating sweets beginning before Halloween and ending around the New Year. I find that having plenty of fresh fruit around during the winter months enables me to grab a grapefruit or an apple rather than a Snickers bar or a piece of cake. Dark chocolate is also a treat and an acceptable one if consumed in small amounts. One of my favorite winter snacks is dipping orange slices in melted dark chocolate. Put them in the fridge for a few hours and enjoy!

Meat as a Condiment

Another holiday tradition is eating copious amounts of meat in the form of ham, turkey and roasts. Eating more meat a few times during the holidays will likely not harm your health, but when it becomes a daily routine it can begin to take a toll. Many of the healthiest people in the world eat much smaller amounts of meat than we do. They tend to have meat in a casserole or stew, but they use less meat and more vegetables, fresh herbs and healthy fats. They also tend to eat more meals that are meatless utilizing beans, nuts and seeds instead of meat.

Eat a High Carb Diet (kind've), but Low in Processed Sugars and Grains

Most people who tell me that they are on low carb diet actually aren't even close to eating low carb. More often than not they are eating a low sugar, low grain diet. Carbs are in many of the foods I am suggesting you eat: fruit, vegetables, beans, and nuts. What you do want to stay away from any time of the year are sugary and highly processed foods. Consuming white breads, pastas and rice in small amounts is fine, but these foods shouldn't be eaten at every meal and they shouldn't fill up the whole plate.

Drink Beverages Low in Liquid Calories

Ok, we all know that soda is bad for us, as it can contribute to weight gain and inflammation. But there are many other drinks that provide us empty calories (calories, but no nutrition), or that contain large amounts of sugar. For example, there are 150 calories in one 12-oz beer. Some juices that are labeled "100% juice" actually contain more sugar than soda because they are so concentrated. Kombucha (a fermented drink) has become very popular and can be relatively low in calories and sugar and may have digestive benefit. Water, of course is still the best beverage to have most of the time.

Eat Foods that Make You Feel Good

The bottom line is this: try to eat foods that make your body and mind feel good. If you eat something and it causes indigestion or heartburn, you might want to think about staying away from that food. If you have a meal and you feel groggy and exhausted afterwards, think about eating differently. Pay attention to foods that make your stomach feel good, give you energy and keep you thinking clearly.

Enjoy the beautiful fall and I hope you have a healthy and joyful winter and New Year!