

Festive season and food in a pandemic year

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We've had a year like no other, and while the shadow of the pandemic still looms over the world, South Africans can breathe a sigh of some relief, that it is, at least, the summer holiday season. A good dose of festive cheer has rarely felt so crucial. The pandemic will inevitably mute our celebrations in various ways. Some of us are feeling the effects of the economic impacts and will have to scale down or forego the treats and luxuries. Others, especially those with vulnerable loved ones, will opt for smaller, home-based gatherings and would rather skip the holiday crowds this year. However we choose to make the most that we can of the festive season, our hearts will be pulled towards those struggling to put food on the table this December, as well as those who have an empty chair at their family table.



If a global pandemic can have a silver lining it is that it has immersed us far more than usual in home life. We've had more concentrated time with our loved ones and closest friends, and that's heightened our appreciation of the really important things in our life. As families, we've cooked more together and shared more meals. Food is at the centre of our social lives and the festive season brings with it particular food traditions and long-established favourite holiday food habits. This brings challenges to starting up or maintaining healthy eating, and to how we can still enjoy special food occasions on tighter budgets this year.

Three registered dietitians, all spokespeople for ADSA (Association for Dietetics in South Africa), share their advice for a happy, healthy 2020 holiday season for all South Africans:

Omy Naidoo, registered dietitian from KZN on beating the budget:

- Opt for much more cooking in rather than eating out; the savings are significant, especially when it comes to larger families
- Add beans, peas and lentils to dishes for a punch of affordable, quality protein so that you can use less meat
- Include more vegetables at every meal to ensure you get a boost of vitamins and minerals without breaking the budget. Start your own summer veggie garden at home
- Cook large meals from inexpensive ingredients, and use your leftovers over the following days
- Every meal doesn't have to have meat which can be swapped out for beans, legumes, eggs or canned fish, which are all cheap, nutritious and delicious sources of protein

Zitandile Mfono, registered dietitian from Eastern Cape on healthy balance:

- Every day and every meal won't be the same, and you should strive for balance over time. For instance, a sweet treat at lunch can be balanced by plenty of vegetables at dinner
- Plan ahead for your 'must-have' favourite celebration meals; make the shopping list for those ingredients and then stick to it. Because you will enjoy getting what you most want out of festive eating, you won't miss those less healthy extras you slipped into your trolley
- Put the tips for healthier alternatives into action so that you can reduce sugar and saturated fats at most meal times
- Have fun with family workouts and long family walks to balance out the long hours sitting down to bigger meals
- Balance is also about the mind; so enjoy your festive meals and holiday time with your loved ones. Despite the difficulties of this year, we are still going to be thankful for the festive cheer

Rosanne Lombard, registered dietitian from Gauteng on *keeping it simple*:

- Don't overcomplicate your nutrition. Try not to restrict yourself and deprive yourself of treats as this tends to lead to a binge. If you can eat the healthier foods most of the time, in portion-controlled amounts, then it is okay to enjoy festive season treats
- Fill at least half your plate with vegetables and salad for an easy way to control your portions
- Drink lots and lots of water, and limit alcohol, which is expensive. This is an easy way to save money and keep healthy
- Make simple breakfasts like oat, banana and egg flapjacks, high fibre cereal and yoghurt, poached eggs and toast and delicious smoothies. For lunches, you can do snack platters with crudité veggies, homemade wraps and filled brown or seeded rolls with a big salad. All of these ideas are super easy and affordable, plus healthy too
- Buy fewer treats and energy-dense snacks. We tend to stock-pile these items during the festive season, and because we have them, we eat them. Rather don't have them in the house. If you really want a treat every now and then, then you can rather go and buy one treat such as an ice cream at the beach or a slice of cake with a friend

A last word from Mfono:

"It's the giving season and the holidays are a time to make extra or pack your leftovers to share with neighbours, friends or your local shelter. In these tough economic times, sharing food can prevent food waste and bring festive cheer to someone else."

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Association for Dietetics in South Africa



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