No Need to Desert Your Desserts

Desserts are savored by many and provide a delightful ending to a wonderful meal. However, we must make smart choices as we select items to serve at the end of meals.

According to the 2005 Dietary Guidelines, consuming added sugars, saturated and trans fats and alcohol will provide calories but little, if any, essential nutrients. As we plan what foods to eat, we should strive for nutrient-dense foods, or foods that provide high nutrient levels and low calorie levels. For example, a medium orange is nutrient dense. It provides about 65 calories, 12 grams sugar, 0 milligrams sodium, and over 60 milligrams Vitamin C. A candy bar has approximately 250 calories, 36 grams sugar, 144 milligrams sodium and 0.6 milligrams Vitamin C. The candy bar is high in calories and has low levels of nutrients.

When serving dessert, consider some healthier options in place of traditional pastries and ice cream. Fruits make a great dessert and help satisfy sweet cravings. Lowfat yogurt can be eaten as a dessert and help fulfill cravings for something creamy. Try layering fruit and lowfat yogurt together and topping with crunchy granola for a tasty, healthy dessert.

Try a new approach to some old favorites. If ice cream is a must, serve smaller portions. Sometimes a small amount will help satisfy your taste for dessert. Scoop a few tablespoons into a shot glass, and serve on a small plate with a single small cookie. Rather than having a large bowl of ice cream, make an upside down dish. Place cut up fruit, such as one cup of strawberry pieces, in a bowl and top with a small scoop of ice cream. Consider ending the meal with one or two small pieces of your favorite candy. Having just a small amount of something delicious can help finish dinner with a satisfying taste.

Other light and tasty dessert ideas include:
- Oatmeal raisin cookie bars
- Angel food cake topped with fresh fruit
- Sugar-free pudding topped with light whipped topping
- Fruit crisp made with oatmeal
- Light frozen yogurt or iced milk topped with fruit
- Baked apples
- Grilled peaches
- Watermelon slices
- Red and green grapes with yogurt sauce

Making trade-offs can also help keep dessert calories in check. If you prefer to have a dessert that is high in fat or sugar, eat a smaller portion. If you are planning to eat out for dinner and know you will be eating dessert, select foods lower in fat throughout the day. Look for lower fat options of some of your favorite foods to incorporate into your eating plan.

When serving dessert at the end of a meal, choose nutrient-dense foods that will add flavor and satisfaction without adding as much to your waistline. Making healthy choices is important whether we are selecting dessert or our next meal.