



## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

### December 2025 Nutrition Article Holiday Eating

The holidays are here, bringing favorite foods, drinks, and sweets we look forward to each year. Staying healthy doesn't mean giving up joy, but for older adults, it's important to enjoy the season without sacrificing well-being. Maintaining a balanced diet during the holidays is just as important as it is any other time of year. To feel your best and fully enjoy the season, stay intentional about keeping energized and healthy.

#### **Festive Nourishment**

Holiday food brings joy, but the quality of food we eat directly impacts our health. Because of the natural way the body's engine parts age, digestion shifts, making it vitally important to think of food as medicine. So much "noise" focuses on what we shouldn't be eating to stay well, but older Americans can enjoy nourishing foods during the holidays by being mindful and intentional.

Real food — quality and wholesome fruits, vegetables, whole grains, animal- and plant-based proteins, and dairy (if there are no intolerance issues) — supports health and can easily be enjoyed creatively with holiday flair. Focusing on wholesome ingredients allows indulgence without restriction. Use the season to experiment with quality foods in festive ways.

#### **Hydration**

Colder temperatures and holiday beverages take center stage, making it easy for water intake to slide. Dehydration poses a significant risk to older adults due to natural physiological changes, a decreased thirst response, and various health conditions. Factors that increase risk include reduced body water from aging, diminished recognition of thirst, and health conditions or medications that cause fluid loss.

Older adults may exhibit symptoms of dehydration that can be easily mistaken for other health issues. Physical signs can include fatigue, weakness, dizziness, dry mouth, and muscle cramps. Cognitive changes may involve confusion, irritability, or changes in mental status. These complications place older adults at greater risk of falls, hospitalization, and overall compromised health. Set an intention to drink at least 64 ounces of water daily, especially during the holiday season when hydration can take a back seat.

#### **Staying Active**

Motion is lotion — yet colder weather has many older adults hunkering down, wrapped in coziness. Staying active as you age is crucial for maintaining physical, emotional, and cognitive wellness. Regular physical activity, regardless of duration or intensity, helps reduce the risk of chronic disease, improves mood, enhances mobility, and builds strength. This can be especially important during the holidays, when seasonal affective disorder, feelings of loss, or increased social events may require more energy and agility.

Therapeutic and enjoyable activities that support overall wellness are best experienced with good physical condition. Engaging in a variety of activities, based on ability, makes physical activity more enjoyable and reduces the risk of injury. Staying active not only supports health but also helps you fully enjoy the season. Learn more about what's possible at [NCOA's senior fitness programs](#).

## Eating Out and Holiday Gatherings

A consistent pattern of eating meals prepared outside the home can be risky, as we often lack access to food labels that allow us to determine the quality or nutrient density of the food. Most, if not all, restaurants and fast-food chains source from large food processing corporations, making it safe to assume most food quality and healthfulness is lost. To keep foods tasty, addictive, and shelf-stable, manufacturers often turn them into ultra-processed products. Being in control of health means being in control of your food.

So, what to do? Eat less. Don't arrive hungry at holiday gatherings or restaurants. For planned events, eat normal and more nourishing items throughout the day. Bring healthy dishes to share, and fill up on quality foods before enjoying the party. And, remember — the holidays are more about the people than the food.

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## Recipe for the month:

### Almond Jam Cookies

Quality foods can also be extended to our sweet treats, like these holiday cookies.

#### INGREDIENTS:

- 1-½ cups frozen berries
- 1 cup pure maple syrup (broken into two ½ cups)
- 1/8 tsp cinnamon
- 2 tsp cornstarch
- 2 cups almond flour
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 tsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 5 Tbsp butter, melted



#### INSTRUCTIONS:

For the Jam Filling:

1. Add the berries, 1/2 cup maple syrup, and cinnamon to a small saucepan.
2. Cook on low heat for 10-12 minutes until berries break down.
3. Run berries through mesh strainer into bowl and mash with a spatula.
4. Return to pan and add cornstarch.
5. Cook on low heat for 2 minutes, stirring until bubbly and thick.
6. Remove and let thicken.

For Almond Cookies:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Mix almond flour, regular flour, baking powder, and salt.
3. In a separate bowl, whisk together the melted butter and 1/2 cup syrup.
4. Mix in dry ingredients and stir until well combined.
5. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.
6. Take 1 Tbsp of dough, roll into a small ball, and place on baking sheets (24 total).
7. Gently press thumb into center of each ball and add 1/2 tsp of jam.
8. Bake each tray for 13-15 minutes.
9. Cool and enjoy!