

Eat intuitively for holiday health

Get outside. With the temperatures finally cooling down and the leaves beginning to change, take a moment to get some fresh air. Whether it's going on a run, walking with a friend, or biking around your neighborhood, get outside and enjoy the crisp air, soft breeze and glowing sun. And don't forget to wear your mask when you get back inside!

Q Between the pandemic and months of social isolation, it has been difficult to manage my health conditions. With the holidays approaching, I'm excited to finally be with my family and friends, but I'm afraid of jeopardizing my health. How can I celebrate the holidays without putting my health at risk?

A Kylie Nowicki, a Brody third-year medical student has some caring thoughts for you. Here is what she said.

As the seasons change and the leaves transition from the greens of summer to the rustic hues of fall, many people have thoughts of pumpkin pie, Christmas cookies and fireside s'mores dancing in their minds. And it's hard not to be excited for the holidays this year! The COVID-19 pandemic robbed many people of their annual visits with family, celebrations with loved ones, and the togetherness that makes the fall and winter seasons so magical.

But balancing the joys of the season with health needs can be difficult. For many Americans, especially those of us in eastern North Carolina, it can be a daunting endeavor to adhere to any semblance of a healthy lifestyle when faced with all the wonderful food this time of year. However, the holidays don't have to be the downfall of all the hard work people put into maintaining their health. This season, I want to challenge you to try integrating an intuitive approach to your dietary habits.

Intuitive eating, conceptualized by Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) Evelyn Tribole, is simple: eat when you're hungry, stop when you're full, and choose foods that bring you pleasure. But for many of us, it is almost impossible to be in tune enough with our bodies to know what our physiological hunger signals "feel" like.

Between work, family, and the many other activities in our day, eating usually goes to the wayside. Whether it's fast food or cramming in a protein bar between meetings, we tend to eat out of obligation, rather than enjoyment, and choose foods that are convenient and comforting, rather than wholesome and nourishing. And to further complicate things, many people also struggle with chronic health conditions that make those more accessible foods dangerous to their health. For people with diabetes, eating desserts and casseroles can wreak havoc on their blood sugars. For



those with high blood pressure, a low-salt diet seems almost impossible this time of year.

Let's face it, it's hard enough to meet your health goals on a regular workday, but the holiday season? Yikes. And honestly, if the holidays are meant for relaxation, rejuvenation, and comfort, why should you deprive yourself? So, this winter, try using the concepts of intuitive eating to bridge enjoyment and health. What would this look like, you may ask? Balance.

For those who struggle with diabetes, carbohydrates are a huge obstacle. But you don't have to deprive yourself. Focus on using your carbohydrate exchanges at the Thanksgiving table. You may have to be more aware of the other foods you consume that day but allow yourself the opportunity to have some joy in a structured way means that you not only get to "indulge" in the festivities, but you do so in a healthier way.

For those with heart disease, find healthier recipes with a "twist" on a classic. Hold the salt when plating your food and fill your plate with as many colors as possible, making sure there is an array of nutritious dishes decorating your table.

And take the time to enjoy your meal. It can take 20 minutes for your stomach and brain to acknowledge that you're full, and at that point many of us are already on our second helping. So slow down, relish the opportunity to eat wonderful food in the presence of those you love, and in doing so "feel" whether you are satisfied before grabbing another plate. These actions may seem simple, but a little can go a long way when it comes to managing your health during the holiday season.

And don't do this alone. Talk to your health care providers about how to integrate the traditional foods of the season into whatever your dietary needs are. Your doctors and dietitians want you to be healthy, but they also want you to enjoy this time of year. So, talk to them about how to do BOTH.

Everyone's needs are different, and the tips I gave today may not be what is best for your specific health goals. But whatever your needs are, the holidays don't need to be a time of total deprivation or utter indulgence. Take the time to enjoy your food, find balance at the table and truly rejuvenate this holiday season. Your body and your brain will thank you.

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LIFE

Rooting for a vegetable mash

A fluffy mashed or pureed vegetable side dish is always a crowd-pleaser, and the humble potato is often the star. This recipe gives the spud a rest and turns to the season's bounty of root vegetables for inspiration.

Nutrient-rich roots are storehouses of energy and guaranteed to add an extra dimension of color and sweet, earthy flavor to the popular mash.

Most roots, such as rutabaga, parsnip, carrot and celery root, are delicious when mashed or pureed. They can be used individually or combined for more nuance and balance in flavor. This recipe combines parsnips with mellow celery root, along with a dollop of roasted garlic. The celery root tamps down the parsnips' sweetness, and the garlic adds buttery richness to the dish.

This is an unfailingly flexible recipe, and you can tinker with the ingredients and method to your taste and preference. For instance, there are several ways to prepare root vegetables for a mash or puree. The skins can be left on for a more rustic and chunky presentation, providing the bonus of extra nutrients. For a smoother and more elegant mash, the skins can be peeled, with silkier results. Roasting root vegetables in the oven coaxes out their natural sugars and delivers extra charred flavor. Simply boiling or steaming the vegetables yields a purer mash.

This recipe is a bit of a hybrid, wherein the vegetables are cook-steamed in a generous amount of chicken stock to add a subtle savory note. (For a vegetarian option, substitute vegetable stock for the chicken stock.) Once the vegetables are cooked until soft, use a potato masher or blitz them



PHOTO BY LYNDY BALSLEV FOR TASTEOFOD

Parsnip and celery root puree.

in a food processor with additional ingredients, such as butter and cheese, for a flavorful puree.

Parsnip and Celery Root Puree

Active time: 15 minutes

Total time: 1 1/2 hours

Yield: Serves 6 as a side dish

Ingredients:

1 medium head garlic
Olive oil
1 1/2 pounds parsnips
1 medium celery root, 1 to 1 1/4 pounds
3 cups chicken stock or vegetable stock, plus more as needed
2 thyme sprigs, plus leaves for garnish
1/4 cup finely grated Parmesan cheese
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

1/2 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Steps:

Roast the garlic: Heat the oven to 400 degrees. Slice off about 1/4 of the top of the garlic head. Place cut-side up on a piece of foil and drizzle the top of the garlic head with olive oil. Wrap the foil up over the garlic and seal. Place in a small ovenproof dish and roast in the oven until soft, 45 minutes to 1 hour. Remove and cool to the touch, then squeeze the garlic out of the papery skin. Set aside 2 tablespoons for the mash and refrigerate any remaining garlic for another use.

While the garlic is roasting, peel the parsnips and celery root. Cut in 1/2- to 3/4-inch pieces and place in a pot. Pour in the 3 cups chicken stock and add the thyme. Bring the stock to a boil, then cover the pot and sim-

mer over medium-low heat until the vegetables are very tender, about 25 minutes. If the pan begins to dry out, add more stock or water to prevent the vegetables from scorching.

Discard the thyme sprigs. With a slotted spoon, transfer the root vegetables to the bowl of a food processor. Add the 2 tablespoons roasted garlic, cheese, butter, salt and black pepper and process to blend. If too thick or lumpy, add some of the reserved cooking liquid (or more stock) and process to your desired consistency. Taste for seasoning and add more salt and black pepper if desired. Serve warm, garnished with fresh thyme leaves.

*Lynda Balslev is an award-winning cookbook author, recipe developer, tester and editor. *Taste Food* is distributed by Andrews McMeel Syndication.*

Valley fever found in contaminated soil

Q I read that something called valley fever is getting to be more common here in Arizona on account of climate change. I've never even heard of it. Can you please explain what it is?

A The term "valley fever" refers to an infection caused by the fungus Coccidioides, or Coccidioides for short, which is found in the soil of certain arid regions. Its habitat includes the Southwestern U.S., as well as Mexico and Central and South America. The fungus has long been known to live in the soil in Arizona, Nevada and California. In fact, the disease gets its name from a severe outbreak of the illness that occurred in the 1930s in the San Joaquin Valley in central California. It's also present in large swaths of Utah, New Mexico and Texas. Recent outbreaks of valley fever show that the fungus is edging into northern Colorado and southern Montana, and it has also made a geographic leap to south-central Washington state.

When soil that contains the valley fever fungus gets kicked up, the fungal spores become airborne. These are the microscopic particles that fungi use to reproduce, much like the seeds in plants. The spores can be freed whenever the soil is disturbed, as occurs during mining, building or agricultural activity, and in severe weather with high winds. You mentioned climate

ASK THE DOCTORS



change, and it is suspected that increasingly dry conditions throughout the West are playing a role in the spread of the fungus.

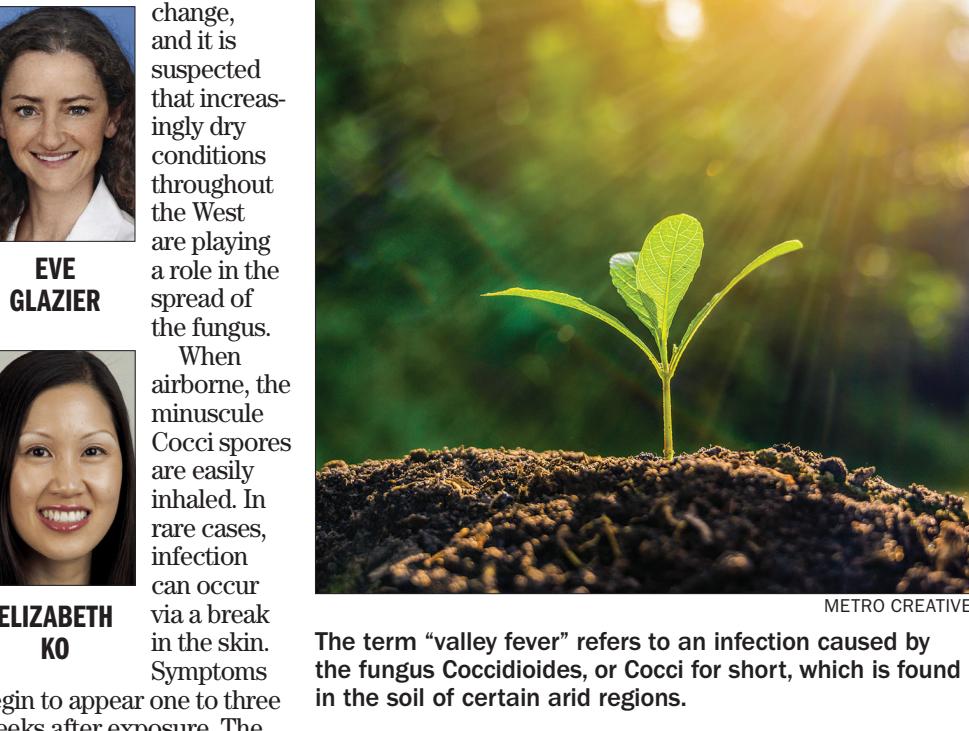
When airborne, the minuscule Coccidioides spores are easily inhaled. In rare cases, infection can occur via a break in the skin. Symptoms begin to appear one to three weeks after exposure. The majority of people will have no reaction to the fungus, or they will develop mild symptoms that abate on their own. However, some people who become infected can become quite ill. Severity of illness has been linked to the number of spores that someone has inhaled. Although the initial site of infection is the lungs, the fungus can then travel throughout the body and cause a range of symptoms.

The onset of infection often begins with general fatigue and a persistent cough. As the fungus travels throughout the body, a skin rash or lesions can appear. People also experience headaches, joint and body aches, night sweats and shortness of breath. Symptoms may go away after a few weeks, or they can be intermittent, fading away and then reappearing. Diagnosis begins with a detailed report of the individual's symptoms, travel history and medical history. Once valley fever is suspected, a blood test for Coccidioides antibodies or antigens will likely be performed. The fungus can cause pneumonia-like illness in the lungs, so imaging scans, such as an X-ray or MRI, may be needed. In severe cases, a

tissue biopsy may be used to see if the fungal infection has become systemic.

Treatment depends on the severity of infection and risk factors for more serious disease. These include pregnancy, diabetes and being immunocompromised. Treatment ranges from watchful waiting to the use of antifungal medication. Most people make a full recovery.

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