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Lean toward healthful meals in making use of surplus

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I know what you're thinking. You don't want to hear about this just now - not right at the beginning of the holidays. You don't want to walk around hungry and deprived in the feasting season, which seems to last longer every year. You're thinking that this is a conversation best suited to guilty January, when New Year's resolutions come into play.

But, the holidays can be a great opportunity to put a new approach to eating into action. Here's how.

Holiday menus often feature more than one vegetable and several salads. Perhaps some of them are family favorites, and some are new recipes. Ever notice how your plate gets overloaded before you reach the end of the buffet? So start with fruits and vegetables and whole grains, and allow meat, potatoes, and gravy its little corner at the end.

Just don't lard up all the vegetables with butter, sour cream, marshmallows and brown sugar.

Think healthful cooking is too much trouble during the busy holiday season? The groaning holiday table can provide the fodder for many meals to come. Leftover vegetables save you the trouble of cooking them for the next meal. Cooked ham, chicken and turkey can be used in healthful salads, casseroles, soups and stews.

If you're going to keep leftover meat for more than a day or two, freeze it.

Holiday time is a great time to try out new recipes. If your children usually turn up their noses at brussels sprouts, perhaps your Aunt Harriet will cheer you on. And, sometimes, caught up in the heat of the moment, your children will (brace yourself) actually try something new.

A great source of healthful new recipes is the American Institute of Cancer Research's "The New American Plate Cookbook." You can also visit its Web site at www.aicr.org. Click on Recipe Corner or sign up for its free recipe newsletter.

If cooking two vegetables per meal seems complicated, consider making a soup, stew or salad meal packed with vegetables and grains. Those are great ways to prep for (or recover from) holiday excesses.

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