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## 11 Frighteningly Fatty Holiday Foods

There's something about the holidays that makes us want to indulge a little — OK, a lot. But a couple trips down the buffet line can pack on the pounds. According to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the average person gains about one pound each year between Thanksgiving and New Year's (some studies indicate up to five pounds). But what if you could have your cake and eat it too? Here, some festive foods to avoid — and healthier substitutes that taste just as delicious.

By Esther Chapman



### Eggnog

The traditional version, whether homemade or store-bought, contains whole milk and cream, packing about 400 calories and 19 grams of fat into one creamy cup — and that's before it gets boozy.

**Healthy Substitute:** Make your own using low-fat milk and equal parts egg whites to whole eggs. (Add a bit of cornstarch to thicken it.) **Homemade eggnog** also allows you to adjust the seasoning and sugar to your taste. Or, try one of the store-bought beverages made with rice or soy milk. Thinner than regular eggnog, these drinks contain about half the calories and one-tenth of the fat of the conventional version, while still retaining that spicy holiday flavor.

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## Cheese Log

Kicking off a holiday dinner with a host of calorie-loaded appetizers makes for a diet disaster. Two of the most traditional pre-meal snacks, dips and cheese logs, typically contain high-fat ingredients like mayonnaise, cream cheese, and sour cream. Pair that with chips or crackers, and the calories pile up fast.

**Healthy Substitute:** You can make your favorite dips in low-fat versions using light or non-fat ingredients, for instance, thick, tangy **Greek yogurt** instead of sour cream. Another option? Ditch the dip and serve plain shrimp with cocktail sauce. "Look for a lighter red sauce made with horseradish rather than ketchup, or a Dijon-mustard-based sauce. Those tend to be lower in calories and sugar, and you don't need to eat a lot because of the added kick," says Christine Gerbstadt, MD, RD, and author of ***Doctor's Detox Diet: The Ultimate Weight Loss Prescription***.

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## Latkes

This potato pancake traditionally served as part of the [Hanukkah celebration](#) earns a dietary thumbs-down primarily because it's deep-fried. One meager, two-ounce serving weighs in at 200 calories and 11 grams of fat.

**Healthy Substitute:** "Instead of deep-frying, brown [latkes](#) in the pan with only a little bit of [olive oil](#) or canola oil, and then bake at 425°F for 10 to 15 minutes each side. You'll sharply reduce the calories and fat content," says Erin Palinski, RD, author of [The Belly Fat Diet for Dummies](#).

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## Vegetable Casserole

Mom's green bean casserole made with cream of mushroom soup, classic sweet potato casserole topped marshmallows, and potato casserole oozing with cheese may all taste amazing but you can't smother side dishes with sugar and fat and still call them "vegetables." These dishes have more than 8 grams of fat per serving, rivaling the most decadent desserts.

**Healthy Substitute:** Sure, you can opt for low-fat ingredients and use less butter in these recipes, but why not let the vegetables shine? Flash [stir-fry](#) or steam the freshest produce you can find, then top them with slivered almonds and a splash of lemon juice or flavored vinegar. The result will be a nutrient-dense, low-fat side that offsets some of the high-calorie or sugary dishes on your plate.

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## **Creamy Soup**

Soup can be a convenient and cost-effective way to feed a large crowd, and it smacks of cozy, home-for-the-holidays goodness. But creamy varieties, often made with (you guessed it) cream, can rack up more than 200 calories per tiny cup.

**Healthy Substitute:** Choose a **broth-based soup**, like **pasta e fagioli**. The combination of broth mixed with vegetables, beans, and pasta will pack a nutrition-rich punch without the extra fat.

Photo Credit: Getty Images



## Rolls with Butter

This holiday tradition has been passed down for decades, despite what we now know: White flour has little nutritional value, and butter, though delicious, is packed with saturated fat.

**Healthy Substitute:** You could switch to whole grain bread and skip the butter, but why bother? A holiday meal offers enough special dishes that nobody will miss the breadbasket. If your menu needs a starch, choose **brown rice** prepared with low-fat broth and garnished with parsley. Not only is this nutty, whole grain rich in fiber, it also contains manganese and selenium, antioxidants that promote bone health and support your immune system.

Photo Credit: Getty Images



## Mashed Potatoes

This make-ahead, kid-friendly side complements just about every dish. However, peeling the potatoes removes the most nutritious part and that's before mixing in butter and whole milk or cream for that rich taste.

**Healthy Substitute:** Reduced-fat butter and skim milk can decrease the fat content of [mashed potatoes](#) from 10 grams to 3 grams per cup. Consider leaving on the skin for added nutrients such as potassium, vitamin C, and even iron. Or, introduce [mashed cauliflower](#) as a low-carb alternative, which boasts a similar flavor and consistency that everyone loves.

Photo Credit: Stock Food



## Prime Rib

The star of the holiday buffet is as strikingly fatty as it is elegant. Just three ounces of prime rib carries 12 grams of fat (4.5 grams of saturated fat), and most people eat twice that amount.

**Healthy Substitute:** For a leaner protein, try [baked fish](#) or [roasted turkey](#). But if your holiday would be incomplete without beef, opt for a healthier cut, such as [flank steak](#), London broil, or [filet mignon](#). Even a brisket can fit the bill if you trim all external fat. "Talk to your butcher and have him trim it for you, just be ready to pay for the pre-trimmed weight," says Gerbstadt. "That will get the meat down to 98 percent fat-free."

Photo Credit: Getty Images



## Gravy

Something about a bowl full of gravy tempts us to smother otherwise delicious food in its warm, salty goodness. Most gravy is made with pan drippings (read: the fat) from the meat, butter, and whole milk. The result? A scary 120 calories and five grams of fat in a typical half-cup serving.

**Healthy Substitute:** "If you want to do it quick and easy, you can actually buy pre-made, fat-free turkey gravy that's still very tasty," says Palinski. Or, she suggests making your own low-fat version using chicken or beef broth, cornstarch, seasoning, and vegetables such as onion and celery. "It will be a bit thinner, but it packs a lot of flavor without the calories."

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## Fudge

Nearly every family seems to have a fudge recipe that makes its way onto cookie platters during the holidays. Unfortunately, one innocent-looking, one-inch square piece of fudge has 90 to 100 calories, a quarter of which are fat. And who can eat only one, elf-size piece?

**Healthy Substitute:** Start a new tradition of low-calorie [fudge](#). The best recipes use almond or coconut butter — both healthier fats than dairy butter — or vitamin-rich mashed fruit such as avocado. Browse vegan cooking sites for ideas (try [chocolatecoveredkatie.com](#)). Or, forego the fudge altogether. Grandma will understand.

Photo Credit: Getty Images



## Pie

Here's the dirty little secret about pie: the crust. Yes, that flaky, buttery crust — made largely of white flour and shortening — contains half the calories, most of the fat, and virtually none of the nutrients found in a slice of fruit pie. To compound the problem, most hosts feel obligated to bake more than one kind of dessert, leading to the "little bit of each" syndrome.

**Healthy Substitute:** If you love the **fruity filling of pie**, choose a one-crust or crust-less version and top it with a small dollop of whipped cream instead of ice cream. Or, go a different route altogether and make a pumpkin or **chocolate soufflé** made mostly with egg whites and little flour. Instead of multiple baked desserts, serve a colorful **fruit salad**. Guests can still taste "a little of each" without the least bit of guilt.

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