Many people will make a resolution at the beginning of 2011 to lose weight. Wouldn’t you like to start the New Year without the added weight gain associated with celebrating the holidays? Many of us notice that we gain weight over the holidays and resolve to lose weight every January by eating healthy and increasing exercise. Some reports say that seasonal weight gain is expected. But not everyone agrees, including the National Institutes of Health. A survey of 200 adults by the National Institutes of Health, as reported in a Consumer Reports Health Blog in December 2009, found the average weight gain between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day was less than a pound, even though most participants estimated they had gained much more. (Consumer Reports Health Blog – December 11, 2009)

Holidays provide us with an abundance of foods usually tied to family traditions. But not all traditional foods are high in calories. Just remember if you overeat you are likely to gain weight.

A variety of foods at holiday celebrations can provide the opportunity to sample high calorie foods without overeating. Using smaller plates and cups at buffet lines helps to limit the size of food portions and serving alternatives to standard fare can be satisfying for most people.

Instead of the traditional finger sandwiches, serve platters of thinly sliced turkey, chicken, roast beef, or ham and an assortment of cheeses with pita bread, wraps or sandwich rounds in half size portions. Whole grain crackers may be served as well. Be sure to include sliced tomatoes, cucumbers, shredded lettuce and other vegetables for a satisfying mini sandwich.

Replace the chocolate fountain with an assortment of dipping sauces in small dishes of low fat flavored yogurt, sweet and sour sauce, and other spicy sauces, including dark chocolate. Don’t skimp on flavor just because you’re cutting back. Your guests can have a selection of cut up fruits and vegetables to choose from. Make your own centerpiece of fruit or vegetables on sticks similar to the popular fruit bouquets. Frozen fruits can add sparkle to your presentation and guests may even enjoy a summer camp special – frozen chocolate and banana treats.

For beverages, consider using 100% fruit juices, sugar free Kool-Aid or Crystal Light with sparkling water, instead of soda for punch. Pineapple, cranberry or grape juice make excellent ice cubes. Splenda can be used for sweetening instead of sugar in Kool-Aid and sparkling water can add the fizz. Add sliced up fruit to the punch instead of ice cream or sherbet for added flavor. Use smaller cups or the old fashioned cups that used to come with punch bowls for serving. Use unsweetened mixers with alcohol to limit calories.

A variety of desserts can be served in small cupcake cups, as most people want just a taste anyway. Instead of bringing Christmas cookies or giving nut breads as a gift, consider giving the Country Soup recipe attached to this article as a healthy alternative.

Avoid all or nothing thinking. Overeating once is not an excuse to continue doing so. Get adequate rest, as stressed and exhausted people tend to eat and drink more. Savor your food and eat slowly. Make a plan for the holidays, enjoy the time with family and friends, and your resolution can be to continue healthy food choices in 2011.

Recipe on back
Country Soup Mix in a Jar

Fills one 1-quart jar

1/2 cup barley
1/2 cup dried split peas
1/2 cup uncooked rice
1/2 cup dry lentils
2 tablespoons dried minced onion
2 tablespoons dried parsley
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon lemon pepper
2 tablespoons low sodium beef bouillon granules
1/2 cup uncooked alphabet pasta
1 cup uncooked twist macaroni

In a wide mouth 1-quart jar, layer the barley, peas, rice and lentils. Then layer around the edges the onion, parsley, salt, lemon pepper, bouillon and the alphabet pasta. Fill the rest of the jar with the twist macaroni. Seal.

Attach a gift card with the following instructions:

COUNTRY SOUP
Add contents of jar to 3 quarts of water, 2 stalks chopped celery, 2 sliced carrots, 1 cup shredded cabbage (optional) and 2 cups diced tomatoes. Over medium low heat, cover and simmer about 1 hour, or until vegetables are tender.

Adapted recipe from: www.recipegoldmine.com/foodgiftsoup/country-soup-mix-jar.html