

Tips for Heart-healthy Holiday Eating



By Beata Blajer, RD, CDE

The holiday season is a wonderful time that brings together family and friends. But so often, our celebrations tend to revolve around food. Whether it's an office potluck or a family dinner, it can be so easy for us to overindulge.

As a registered dietitian with Southlake Regional Health Centre's Cardiovascular Prevention and Rehabilitation Program and Diabetes Education Centre, I'm often asked how to enjoy festive gatherings, without completely losing track of healthy living goals. I always encourage people to avoid skipping meals before parties. Be sure to eat throughout the day, opting for lighter meals and healthy snacks. Never go to a party on an empty stomach ? you'll almost certainly overeat.

It's also a good idea to volunteer to bring a healthy snack or treat, like my no-bake, nut-crust ed cheesecake. This recipe is low on sugar, getting most of its sweetness naturally from dates and blueberries. It's also high in antioxidants, fibre and phytonutrients ? making this cheesecake heart and waist-friendly and delicious!

No Bake Nut-Crust ed Cheesecake

Makes two 8? pies or 24 individual cheesecakes in muffin tins

Crust:

- 1 cup almonds
- 1 cup cashews
- ½ cup pitted dates
- ¼ cup dried coconut (shredded, unsweetened)
- 1 tablespoon coconut oil

Filling:

- 1 cup cashews (soaked for minimum 2 hours)
- 1 cup light ricotta cheese
- 1 cup light cream cheese
- 3 tablespoon coconut oil
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- 2 tablespoon sugar or xylitol
- 2 teaspoon vanilla extract or paste

Blueberry Coulis:

- 3½ cups fresh or frozen blueberries
- 1-2 tablespoon lemon juice

Directions for Cheesecake:

Place cashews in a large bowl and cover with cold water. Soak for a minimum of two hours (or overnight), then rinse, drain, and set

aside.

To make the crust, pulse almonds, cashews, dates, shredded coconut and coconut oil in food processor to a sticky crumb-like consistency.

Sprinkle shredded coconut on the bottom of two 8-inch pie dishes or two 12-muffin trays lined with muffin tin liners, then press the nut mixture onto coconut to make crust.

To make the filling, place soaked cashews, cream cheese, ricotta cheese, coconut oil, lemon juice, sugar/xylitol, vanilla extract/paste in the bowl of food processor and purée until smooth.

Pour mixture onto crust, and freeze one to two hours, or until firm. Remove from freezer, defrost in fridge for about one hour, or on countertop 30 minutes; top with blueberry coulis and serve.

Directions for Blueberry Coulis:

Combine blueberries and lemon juice in a saucepan and bring to simmer over medium heat for about 10 minutes.

If the blueberry coulis is not thick enough, mix 2 tablespoons cornstarch with cold water, then drizzle it into the simmering coulis gradually, adding just enough to lightly thicken. If desired, add 1-2 teaspoon sugar for additional sweetness.

Pour coulis over cheesecake just before serving.