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Simple Thanksgiving Makeovers: Easier, Greener, and Healthier

It's amazing how a joyful celebration like Thanksgiving can become so stressful. We start out looking forward to a special time with family and friends. Then, we get all wrapped up in preparing a huge feast, surrounded by perfect decorations, in an immaculately clean house. With all our expectations, it's no wonder we often end up exhausted and too stressed out to enjoy ourselves.

"A few simple changes in your usual Thanksgiving routine can make a big difference in your health and your happiness," says Crystelle Fogle, MBA, RD (Registered Dietitian), Cardiovascular Health Program Manager with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. "There's no need to do an extreme makeover or eliminate family traditions. The goal is simply to establish some healthier habits that help to reduce stress and bring the real meaning of the holiday back into focus."

Subtle holiday makeovers are good for much more than your physical and mental health. They can have a very positive impact on both your household budget and the environment as well. Here are six win-win strategies to consider as you begin to plan for your family's upcoming Thanksgiving holiday. And, before you get stressed out by these tips from Eat Right Montana, take a deep breath: Just try one or two new things this year - and see how it goes. If you like the simpler approach to giving thanks, you can always make some more changes next year.

For an **easier** Thanksgiving dinner:

- **Get others involved in planning, preparation, and clean up:** Sit down together and decide how each person is going to help with the festivities. Find out what foods they really want to have.
- **Cook your specialties, let others help with the rest:** Prepare things from scratch that you really enjoy. Buy the rest pre-made at the store or let your guests help by bringing their special dishes.

For a **greener** Thanksgiving celebration:

- **Enjoy some local foods:** Cut down on those food miles by ordering a turkey from a local farmer. See what local produce, like apples and squash, may still be available at your community coop.
- **Use natural or edible decorations:** Skip expensive flowers or one-time throwaway centerpieces. Enjoy a festive fall basket of fruits and nuts or let children create a dried arrangement from your yard.

For a **healthier** Thanksgiving holiday:

- **Have more fruits and veggies - and smaller desserts:** Serve brightly colored produce, like a fruit tray as an appetizer and a baby spinach salad with raisins. Make the pie slices half their usual size.
- **Plan fun physical activities:** Move away from just watching football on TV. Start a flag football game for everyone at a nearby park. Have your own Thanksgiving parade around the neighborhood.

According to Fogle, giving kids simple jobs is a great way to keep them out of a busy kitchen. "They can decorate plain paper napkins or draw pictures for the guests about things they are thankful for."

Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana's monthly packets can be downloaded for free at

www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm