

Total Nutrition

Celebration Stress Busters

by Mindy Hermann, R.D.

(NAPSA)—I start thinking about celebrations about a month ahead of time. Regardless of what I'm planning—a birthday party, a holiday meal or a dinner with friends—I need a lot of time to decide on a menu, shop, cook and get the house ready. Planning



Mindy Hermann

ahead works for me because it lowers my stress level. One or more of these strategies may help to reduce your stress:

Give up your inner "Martha."

Many of us strive to be the perfect host, trying to prepare perfect food and decorations to create the ideal celebration. Unfortunately, doing too much in too little time increases stress, as well as disappointment when the results don't match the promise in the magazine or television show.

Set aside morning time for exercise. "Try to exercise first thing in the morning," suggests Therese Samarco, L.M.S.W., manager of the Behavioral Medicine Department at the Health Alliance Plan in Detroit. "Physical activity is a great stress reliever, and if it's out of the way for the day, you'll feel less stressed about trying to fit it in during a busy day."

Balance your eating. "Eat somewhat less during the day, but don't starve yourself in order to

overeat at a party," says Ms. Samarco. "Before you leave home, eat something small, about 100 to 200 calories, so that you're not ravenous." A bowl of Whole Grain Total® topped with milk and fruit, for example, is a satisfying pre-party snack, as well as a nutrition-packed breakfast.

Plan ahead. Decide how much you are going to eat and drink before you get to the celebration. Ms. Samarco notes that "although it's a relaxant, alcohol can increase your stress by lowering your inhibitions and also making you feel lousy the next day so that you don't feel like exercising or eating properly."

Just say no. Take a look at your calendar to make sure that your schedule has room for another party. It's okay to say no if fitting in another celebration is too difficult.

Ask Mindy

Q: What can I do at family parties? My relatives make me feel guilty about not eating the foods they prepared.

A: Before you go to the party, decide what and how much you plan to eat—the good thing about family parties is that the food tends to be the same each time—and rehearse your answer to family members who tell you that you're eating too little. Or try eating a little of the foods they prepared, and fill up on fruits and veggies, always a good choice.