

Avoiding the Pesach Pounds



By Nechama Cohen

I've heard it said that Jewish history can be summed up like this: Someone tried to destroy us, Hashem saved us, let's celebrate. This, of course, translates into the family gathering together and eating, eating and more eating.

Being a Jew means we are celebrating almost three months out of every year. We have Shabbat every week and a holiday every two months—even on fast days, we tend to make up for lost time, both before and after. Then there are an abundance of joyous occasions, such as Brises, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, engagements, weddings, *Sheva Berachot*, et cetera. As they say in

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Hebrew: “*sibah lemesibah*,” if there is a reason for a party, you can find us at the table.

Then along comes Pesach, and I know what you're thinking: How will I ever get through this matzah-potato-egg holiday? This year, Pesach begins on a Saturday night, which means we will be dealing with a three-day holiday. In other words, six consecutive large meals! But, surprisingly enough, there are ways to keep the calories down even during this most challenging time.

Nutritional challenges are, partially, a mind game. Thus, in some ways, being health conscious can be easier on Pesach. The fresh breads and baked goods that are so hard to resist during the rest of the year are not lying around tempting you. Moreover, matzah is easier on many people's digestive systems. Most importantly, it is simpler to con-

trol one's portion size with matzah than with challah. (One board of matzah is equivalent to two slices of bread.)

Below are a few tips that can help ensure this Pesach is truly a healthful one: *

- **No Weight Gain with Whole Grain**

Try using whole-grain matzah for the Seders as well as for the rest of Pesach. Simple carbohydrates—found in highly refined grains such as white flour—are very high on the glycemic index, which means they break down quickly and get into our digestive systems fast, raising blood sugars to a higher level. They leave one feeling hungry and tired after the initial boost tapers off. Complex

**Do not make any changes in your diet without first checking with your doctor.*



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carbohydrates, on the other hand, such as whole wheat and spelt flours, take longer to digest and are released into the bloodstream slowly, which is easier on the system. In fact, it is recommended that those who are insulin-resistant or who gain weight easily should eat whole-wheat matzah instead of bread all year round, not just on Pesach.

• **The Four Cups**

Sweet wines and grape juice contain very high concentrations of sugar. Try using dry wine instead. Additionally, ask your rabbi if you can dilute the wine with water. This will, of course, help lower the alcohol and the calorie content. If you are not accustomed to drinking very dry wine, add artificial sweeteners to make it tastier.

• **Cut it Out**

While everyone tends to use loads of eggs during Pesach, there's no reason to

use all those yolks. Use half the amount of yolks called for in any recipe. If you feel guilty throwing them out, remember that each one has seventy calories and consists mostly of fat and cholesterol. The protein is found in the white part of the egg.

• **Limit the Potatoes**

The potato is a high-carb vegetable. Try limiting the amount of potatoes used in souffles, kugels and blintzes by mixing in cauliflower, zucchini and other low-carb vegetables.

• **Go Green**

During the Seders, we must eat quite a bit of matzah to fulfill the mitzvah. But there's no reason why the rest of the meal needs to be heavy on the carbs. Pile on a variety of salads and use your imagination when it comes to dressings. You can cut down the amount of oil used in a dressing by adding water,

lemon juice, mustard and spices. Use green and purple onions; they add color and lots of flavor. (Green onions are a bit more fibrous and are lower in carbs.)

• **Stay Light**

For all the holiday meals, including the Seders, include fresh fruit and other light desserts, instead of the traditional high-carb cakes and cookies. Also, keep your Pesach cakes light by cutting the amount of egg yolks and sugar called for in the recipes. To add flavor, try mixing egg whites with nuts or coconuts. Instead of sugar, use flavorings such as vanilla and lemon extract.

• **Go the Extra Mile**

Literally—get out and walk. A three-day holiday means plenty of leisure time. It's springtime, so make the most of the weather. Above all, cut the stress factor, keep smiling, and make small changes one step at a time. **JA**