

What would a beautiful shabbas table be like with non-kosher food? While kosher food is important for the soul, healthy food is important for the body. With the focus of food linked to kashrut, the mitzvot and knowledge of healthy eating is often put on the back burner. Kosher and healthy should go hand and hand.

As a single person (thank G-d, not for much longer), I eat most of my shabbas meals out and frankly, it's a challenge. There are actually people's homes I won't return to because of the overwhelmingly huge quantities and number of dishes being served. A beautiful shabbas table is necessary. However, when the dinner conversation is more about the food than the parsha, something is lost in translation. When the main shabbas activity is eating, you have less time to focus on shabbas activities like reading, G-d, etc.

As a nutritionist, watching what goes into people's mouths on shabbas is alarming. The dichotomy of making sure everything that passes through your lips is kosher but ignoring what the food actually is comes to mind.

With the bombardment of advertising and marketing, even one who wants to eat healthy is having a hard time. With the prevalence of diabetes and the escalating obesity rate, the old adage, "calories on shabbas don't count," has to fade away. The fact that obesity outweighs malnutrition in the world makes you realize what a serious issue this has become. Today, the universal knowledge that obesity and a high-fat diet correlate with the leading causes of death can't be forgotten on shabbas. The good news though, is that there are a myriad of ways your table can exude the essence of shabbas without adding to your waistline. Just like there are negative and positive mitzvot, Nutrition isn't just what you take out, it's also what you add. Here are 3 tips to help make your shabbas liter.

1. Let's start with the challah. We make the bracha on 2 challahs because we were given a double portion of manna in the desert, not because we are supposed to eat double the number of calories. Challah, the 1st food eaten on shabbas should be savored. Just like anything you have too much of though, it can become dull. When you hear the hamotzi, do you realize that millions of people all over the world are making the same bracha, or are you thinking about how many hours it has been since you had lunch? Enjoy that 1 piece of challah because challah signifies the beginning of the meal, not a separate course. If you have your one piece, it is special and you have room left for the rest of the meal.
2. The salad course. Those prepared fatty dips that are commonplace on everyone's table are not salad. Most of the dips list fat as the 1st or 2nd ingredient and have calorie levels above sea level. If you fill a salad plate with dips, you probably have enough calories you need for the entire meal, even the entire day. Instead, make a colorful green salad. The more bright colored foods, the more antioxidants you receive. Therefore, the prettier your plate, the prettier your heart. As for the real salads, leave the dressing on the side. Salad dressing can be a great addition to your salad without adding high amounts of fat. There are great ways to be creative and make your own healthy dressings. (cookinglight.com, eatingwell.com).

Substitute chicken stock or brewed tea for most of your oil in your homemade dressing. You can even add some citrus juice too for more flavor and vitamins. Also, using flavored vinegar instead of salad dressing (on the side of course) lets you savor the flavor of the salad ingredients while eliminating all of the fat. What a bargain. You can now appreciate the main course even more because you are not so full from the fatty dips.

3. The main course. All those dishes to be passed around. If you are lucky enough to be seated next to a passer, you will have the opportunity to put a lot of food on your plate. Most people take bites of the food they put on their plate before all the dishes get passed around. Sometimes you discover a kugel on the other side of the table half way through your meal. Unfortunately a non-passer intervened and it never came your way. When you add new foods to your plate toward the end of the meal, you can't possibly know how much food you have consumed. I notice some people eating seconds before others get firsts. The best way is to have all the food you are going to eat on your plate before you partake of the main dish. Just as you take a minute to contemplate as you enter a shul or daven, take a minute to see all that you are going to eat. Make sure you have everything you want and look down at your plate. Is there enough? Do you really need seconds? Thirds? It is ok to wait a minute while everyone is spooning and tasting to fill your plate. Put your fork down until all the serving dishes have come your way. This way, you will know what you have eaten and you won't need seconds. Just like the salad course, fill your plate with colors, they will reflect back at you.

Now that you have some tips to make your shabbas lighter, realize that you can have your cake and eat it too, but let's leave healthy desserts for another topic.