

## Celebrate Each Day in a Healthy Way

It is that time of year again when we come together to celebrate the holidays. Whether you celebrate Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanza, and/or New Year's Day, you are most likely enjoying time with your friends and family.

Did you know that there are many days throughout the year dedicated to celebrating a certain food? For example, each year on July 28<sup>th</sup> we celebrate National Chocolate Milk Day, and April 30<sup>th</sup> is known as National Raisin Day. Even though we may not know why a certain day of the year was chosen for a food to be recognized, why not try to taste the food, especially if you have not eaten it before. For instance, you may be surprised to find that you like raisins as a snack.

It is important to be aware that some celebrated food days are high in calories and fat. For example, each year on the first Friday of June, it is National Donut Day. Remember that all foods can fit in your diet if eaten once in a while and in a controlled portion.

The following are three days in the year that celebrate a certain food. Read on so you can learn how to include these foods as part of a healthy diet.

### Eat a Red Apple Day-December 1st

Everyone has heard of the saying, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." This phrase actually came from Wales in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This saying was created because of the health benefits we get from eating apples. Just like many other fruits and vegetables, apples can help decrease our risks of heart disease, stroke, and some cancers such as colon, prostate, and lung. There are many reasons that apples give us health benefits. One reason is that apples are high in a variety of vitamins, which fight off diseases and reduce the number of damaged cells in your body. Apples are also low in calories, which makes them a great snack for managing your weight. Apples are rich in fiber, but of course, you must eat the skin! Fiber does many great things for our

bodies, such as helping to regulate our digestive tract. It also keeps us feeling full for longer periods of time, which prevents us from over eating. In addition, fiber

helps in lowering cholesterol levels and controls blood sugars. Apples are also low in fat and sodium and are cholesterol free.



Did you know that there are 7,500 varieties of apples grown throughout the world? They come in a variety of colors, such as red,

green and yellow. Each has its own distinct flavor.

There are many ways you could enjoy an apple. Eat an apple raw, try it cooked or baked, or even as a juice. However, make sure not to add sugar and other high calorie ingredients that may cancel the healthy reasons for eating apples. If you drink apple juice, make sure it is 100% juice with no added sugars in it. A red apple is a good way to begin the holiday season and offset those baked goods. Make a salad festive by adding red colored apples with some green colored fruits, such as kiwi and green grapes, or mix the apples with romaine lettuce and a vinaigrette dressing.

### Granola Bar Day-January 21st

Granola is a type of cold cereal containing rolled oats along with fruit, nuts, and other various ingredients. On January 21<sup>st</sup>, you are encouraged to make and eat a healthy granola bar. These bars have been a popular type of breakfast food since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and became more of a snack around the 1970's.

Granola bars originated in the 1800's as a health food. Unfortunately this is no longer always the case, as it's more common today to see bars with added sugar and other high calorie ingredients. Some granola bars may be more similar to a candy bar when they contain large amounts of chocolate, honey, syrup, and butter. However, if made with the right ingredients, such as oats, nuts, seeds, and dried fruits, these bars can be full

of protein and fiber. If chosen wisely, these bars can be part of a healthy lifestyle.



If you are looking to make your own nourishing granola bars, there are several ways to do so. For a firm, crunchy bar, your ingredients should be baked. If you want a chewier bar, bake with a shorter time frame, or not at all. Now try making your own, and be creative by

adding your favorite nuts, fruit, and spices. But don't forget the main ingredient, oats!

To get you started, try this **granola bar recipe**.

#### Ingredients

- 2 cups oats
- 1 ¼ cup peanut butter
- 1 cup flaxseed
- ¾ cup honey
- ¾ cup dried cranberries
- ¼ cup slices almonds

#### Directions

- Stir all ingredients together in a large bowl. Press into a 9x11 inch baking dish. Use the back of a spatula to press into a flat layer.
- Refrigerate mixture for at least one hour.
- Cut into 12 bars and serve.

Recipe adapted from [www.allrecipes.com](http://www.allrecipes.com)

## **Pistachio Day-February 26th**

Pistachios are small nuts that are packed with protein and healthy fats. They grow on trees and are native to the Middle East. The tree takes 7-10 years to mature and produce the nut and is harvested in September. Machines are used to shake the tree and collect the nuts, a process which takes less than one minute. In the United States, California is the major producer of pistachios. However, Iran is the largest grower world-wide, even though most are actually consumed in China.

When the pistachio is ripe and ready to eat, the hull, or outer shell, splits open, which makes this nut so unique. Because of this, in China this nut is known as the “happy nut”, and in the Middle East it is called the “smiling nut.” You may see pistachios that are red in



color. The red dye that is sometimes added is due to consumer demand, and does not change the nutritional content of the nut.

Pistachios, along with other nuts, are high in healthy fats, called unsaturated fats. These fats can lower your bad cholesterol and raise your good cholesterol levels. However, it is still important to remember portion control when eating higher fat foods, even ones that are full of healthy fats. Pistachios can be part of a healthy diet when eaten in moderation. A small handful a day can give you the health benefits without adding too many calories to your diet. Pistachios are loaded with vitamins and minerals that can fight off diseases, and they are an excellent source of fiber.

These nuts can be part of a snack on their own or can be mixed with others foods, such as in a trail mix or added to your granola bar recipe.

Here is another recipe to taste...**trail mix apple salad**.

#### Ingredients

- 1 medium apple, coarsely chopped
- ¾ teaspoon of lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons chopped pistachios
- 1 tablespoon sunflower kernels
- 1 tablespoon dried cranberries
- 2 teaspoons of honey
- 1 teaspoon flaxseed
- 1/8 teaspoon cinnamon

#### Directions

- In a small bowl, combine the apple and lemon juice. Add remaining ingredients; toss to coat. Chill until serving. Yield: 2 servings.

Recipe adapted from [www.tasteofhome.com](http://www.tasteofhome.com)

## **The Bottom Line**

You've discovered just three days during the year that encourage you to celebrate healthy foods by including them in your meals and snacks. Remember though, these foods can be part of a healthy diet throughout the whole year, and are not just to be eaten on these certain days. So why not look up other days that can help you enjoy a variety of other foods during the year as well? Now what food is observed the last Saturday before Labor Day? Hmm.....

### **Need a Dietitian?**

Registered Dietitians are here to help you with your nutrition questions. To make an appointment call 412.692.4497 (Oakland location) or 412.623.2421 (Shadyside location).