Give the **Gift** of **Fitness**

By Molly Kimball

Ask Molly

You've got questions? Our nutritionist, **Molly Kimball**, LDN, RD, CSSD has the answers.

It's time to rethink the old standbys of fudge-filled tins and baskets of holiday-themed cookies. Break the tradition of ties for dad and scarves for mom. This year, consider giving the gift of wellness to your friends, family and co-workers. Here's a list of fabulous fitness gifts for the mind and body—with options in all price ranges.

- Massage gift certificate
- Yoga or Pilates sessions
- Nutrition consultation
- Series of workouts with a personal trainer
- Athletic shoes
- Workout gear
- Basket of favorite nutrition bars and drink mixes
- Subscription to fitness-related magazines
- Cooking classes
- Homemade whole grain muffins and breads
- Fruit-of-the-month club

Q *Being a vegetarian during the holiday season can be difficult. How can I enjoy feasts with family without compromising my beliefs? What are some high-protein vegetarian alternatives to turkey?*

You are wise to be thinking ahead for your protein options during the holidays. Foods high in protein tend to be more satiating and provide a more sustained release of energy. One of biggest keys during the holidays is to plan, plan, plan.

Depending on who's hosting the holiday meal, you may be comfortable asking them to prepare some protein-rich vegetarian-friendly fare. If you aren't, offer to bring a few dishes; not only will you have several options available, it will also make you a more gracious guest! Plus, it's a great opportunity to expose your friends and family to a side of your life that has special significance.

Beans and lentils top the list of protein-rich vegetarian options. You can serve them as a soup, chilled as a salad, or formed into black bean cakes as an appetizer (see recipe).

Vegetarian ground "meat" is another versatile protein source. Try adding it to stuffings and dressings. The texture is pretty similar to regular ground meat, so there's a chance no one would even notice!

Whole Foods has a meatless turkey-style roast (located in the freezer section), an excellent choice as a main course, particularly if there are several people looking for meat-free options.

For something a little more mainstream, make a vegetarian lasagna. The ricotta and/or cottage cheese commonly used in lasagna make it higher in protein, even without the ground meat.

Another idea is to bring protein-rich appetizers. Easy protein-rich favorites are hummus with whole-wheat pita, nuts and cheese (regular or soy cheese, depending on whether you're a vegetarian or vegan).

As you can see, there are plenty of dishes that can satisfy even the most diehard carnivore. Taking a little time and effort to plan and prepare will make your holiday season just that much easier and stress-free!

Please write or email your questions or comments to molly@livingneworleans.com, we'd love to hear from you.

Recipe

Black Bean Cake

From Susan Spicer's Crescent City Cooking

1 pound black beans
1 green bell pepper, chopped
1 onion, chopped
1 small jalapeno, chopped
1 tablespoon garlic, minced
2 tablespoons honey
2 tablespoons cider vinegar
1 teaspoon chili powder
1 teaspoons ground cumin
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions: Cook black beans in water until tender. Sauté onion, peppers and garlic over medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes and add to beans in pot along with all other ingredients. Season with salt and pepper, and stir frequently until beans have absorbed water and start to break down. Puree and dry. Form beans into cakes, dust with flour and sauté. Serve with a dollop of sour cream and a sprig of cilantro. Serves four.

Best served alongside grilled shrimp, also featured in Crescent City Cooking. For more information, or to ake reservations at Susan Spicer's Bayona Restaurant, please call 504.525.4455

Nutrition Facts per Serving:
430 calories / 25 grams protein / 76 grams carbohydrate
17 grams fiber / 0 grams total fat / 0 grams saturated fat
40 mg sodium

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