A low-fat, low-cal holiday feast sounds like an oxymoron, consider the fact that clever pros can reinvent traditional fare and come up with some new twists that let you leave the table feeling happy, not ready to fall asleep. True, many classics are heavy by nature: baked ham, filet of beef, cream-laden vegetables and butter-basted turkeys. But without much effort, you can pull off festive meals that are colorful, delicious and even good for you.

Consider Richard Ruben’s baked ham, for instance.

“Traditionally, it has a lot of brown sugar and molasses in the glaze, but I do mine with a fruit glaze and serve with an onion marmalade,” says Ruben, an instructor at the Institute of Culinary Education. “This way, people can save their excesses for dessert!”

Whatever course you’re modifying to cut back on fat and calories, moderation is key, says Toby Amidor, registered dietitian and instructor at the Art Institute of New York City.

“Focus on baked potatoes, fruit-based desserts and minimize your intake of breads and alcohol,” she recommends. “Gravies and sauces have a lot of hidden calories, so request them on the side. And plan ahead. If you’re eating a large meal at night, eat light during the day. After a meal, take a nice brisk walk with loved ones. And reconsider your cooking methods. Obviously, fried foods should be reserved for Santa, whose giant belly isn’t a liabilities. But the rest of us should roast, bake and steam. Scott Swartz, instructor at the Art Institute of New York City, takes steaming one step further by cooking en papillote (a fancy term for cooking in parchment). “All the flavors are sealed, and the fish cooks in its own natural juice,” he says. “It’s light and very healthy.”

Soup (other than cream versions) can be a healthy way to stave off food binges when you’re at a dinner party, says Keri Glassman, a nutrition counselor and consultant in Manhattan. “Soup helps you feel full,” she says. “I like serving it in tiny demitasse cups and passing it at a party — that’s very trendy right now. And to go with it, a prosciutto and asparagus appetizer has protein, so you don’t get too hungry and tempted to eat a high-carb meal.”

That way, your holiday gift to yourself will be weighing the same in January as you did on Dec. 1.

### SPICED FRUIT-GLAZED HAM

**Serves 6**

From Richard Ruben, who recommends that you buy a leg cut, which is leaner than the shoulder, and trim off any excess fat. The best accompaniments are roasted red peppers marinated In balsamic vinegar and garlic, and steamed spinach.

- 1 large ham, preferably cut from the leg
- 3/4 cup pomegranate juice (unsweetened)
- 2 oranges, peeled and seeds removed
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon ground fennel seeds
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 3 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed to a paste

Place all ingredients except ham in a blender or food processor, and blend until smooth. Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. Trim the excess fat from the ham, and then score it in a
Extra-virgin olive oil
cup leek, cut in julienne strips
cup fennel, cut in julienne strips
cup carrot, cut in julienne strips
cup celery, cut in julienne strips
cup red bell pepper, cut in julienne strips
(6-ounce) each tilapia fillets
and pepper to taste
Tablespoons fresh basil, sliced thin
cup white wine

1 medium sweet potato, peeled and cut in ¼-inch cubes
2 large carrots, peeled and cut in ¼-inch cubes
1 (15-ounce) can garbanzo beans
2 cups fresh or frozen green beans
1 cup fresh zucchini, sliced
tea spoon salt
tea spoon freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon fresh basil, minced

TRICOLOR STUFFED PEPPERS
Serves 6
A nice appetizer or first course from Toby Amidor at the Art Institute of New York City. If you like, serve this as a vegetarian entrée, substituting pecans or almonds for the chestnuts.

1/2 cup brown rice
6 bell peppers
Nonstick cooking spray
Salt and pepper to taste
1/2 cup apricot jam
1/4 cup soy sauce
2 tablespoons toasted sesame seeds and sliced scallions, for garnish
3/4 teaspoon nutmeg
Salt and pepper to taste
6 fresh basil leaves, for garnish

Cook the brown rice according to directions. Wash and core peppers. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spray a large baking dish with nonstick cooking spray. In a large bowl, mix cooked bell peppers, apricot jam, and soy sauce. Stuff each pepper with the mixture. Bake, uncovered, for 40 minutes. Garnish with toasted sesame seeds and sliced scallions.