

NUTRITION

Thanksgiving Day Revolution

Thanksgiving Day, traditional American celebration with its own foods and customs, is undergoing a startling change as advances in food technology are made.

By **BENITA TALL**

► TODAY WE tend to accept "revolution" in everything from automobiles to national politics, yet there is one revolution taking place that few persons are aware of: The revolution in a meal, the Thanksgiving Day dinner.

There has been a revolution on the farm, in the food processing factory, in the grocery store, in the kitchen and in the laboratory.

Things are no longer being done the way they used to be even in the prosaic matter of what we eat on the traditional American holiday.

Not long ago, probably within the lifetimes of most persons living now, we used to look at a Thanksgiving Day table covered with several kinds of potatoes, beans, squash, turnips and parsnips, stuffing, jellies, preserves, pies, hot breads and—the crowning glory of the table—a 25-pound turkey. And we would count the things Americans had to be thankful for, with "good," plentiful food high on the list.

In the past 50 years, however, scientists have been studying the American diet. Now it seems that while we have a plentiful food supply, we may not always eat "good" food.

By "good" food, the scientists, of course, mean food that is nutritious. In one sense all food is nutritious: it supplies the human body and its billions of functioning cells with some vitamins, some minerals and some calories. A nutritious food gives good value when you compare such things as cost with vitamins and minerals. And cost should include not only the purchase price of the food but also the amount of waste involved in preparing and eating the food and, perhaps most important, the cost in calories.

Undernourished Americans

It is in this last respect that many nutritionists feel Americans are not well-fed. Admittedly there are many persons who are underweight and undernourished. The more prevalent condition in this country, however, is that of being overweight and, often, undernourished.

Publicity concerning the problem of overweight has led to a flood of special foods, pills and regimens designed to solve the problem and again return the individual to his healthy, slender self. More important is the fact that public attention has been turned to the need for change in its eating habits.

The Thanksgiving Day table, 50 years

ago and today, is a good example of this change.

The change has been a dramatic one. Not only has the amount of food consumed changed, but the kind and variety has changed too. Many factors in addition to the emphasis on solving the overweight problem have helped bring about this revolution in a meal.

Americans are no longer dependent upon local farmers or their own backyard garden for their winter supply of vegetables and fruits. Speedier transportation, improved storage methods and better food processing are responsible for bringing what were once thought of as seasonal "summer" or "spring" foods to the table even at Thanksgiving time.

Research for Nutrition

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, often working in cooperation with states and with industry, has been in the forefront of developments in the food industry in all its phases, from the farm to the dining table.

Scientists have bred new varieties of fruits and vegetables. This has meant more extensive growing areas and, eventually, the capability to provide a larger market with what had once been "luxury" produce. This is one reason why broccoli, for instance, now appears on many Thanksgiving Day tables along with the cranberries and turkey.

Another reason is the advances in the storing and shipping of food. Engineers and scientists seek to find the temperature that is just right for keeping a particular fruit or vegetable at its peak freshness until it arrives at the consumer's kitchen. They investigate the intricacies of packaging and shipping.

Growth of harmful molds and fungi is intensified under some packaging conditions, scientists have found. It even makes a difference with some fruits, for instance, if they are packed on their sides, or touching one another, or in layers, wrapped in papers or plastic, or boxed separately.

Temperature is another important factor in our changing food habits. Scientists have discovered the optimum temperatures for storing, shipping and preserving many important foods. For various foods the critical temperature may range widely and it is the scientist's job to discover how high or how low the temperature can go before undesirable chemical and physical changes take place.

Advances in growing, packaging and shipping foods means that the nutritionist now has a freer hand in calling attention to the foods that make up a wholesome

diet. As persons become more familiar with "strange" foods they also become willing to venture away from the standard recipes and methods of preparation as well as more concerned with the food value of their diets.

Researchers have even found that stuffing can vary considerably in its bacterial count, depending on what foods are used in addition to the bread. White bread, in contrast to corn bread, stuffings using apricots, cranberries or other acid foods had the lowest counts.

The Thanksgiving Day table, with its leafy green vegetable, fewer starches—often now only one kind of potato is served—and sweets, is witness to the revolution in American eating habits. Even the recipe-writers are aiding and abetting the nutritionists with a flood of recipes telling the homemaker how to make less-fat gravies, sugar-less cranberry relishes, or how to prepare and roast a turkey without stuffing and yet have a "goodlooking bird."

The table may no longer groan under the weight of its holiday-time foods, but Americans will probably be better nourished when, this Thanksgiving Day, they rise from a table that had carried a lighter and more varied burden of foods.

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Proper Eating Habits Reduce Mortality Rate

► THIS IS a healthy country, but contrary to popular belief, it is not the healthiest country in the world, particularly for men in their prime.

Statistics show that at 45 years of age the American male can look forward to fewer birthdays than can his contemporary in Norway, The Netherlands, Denmark, Italy, Canada, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, England and Wales, Dr. Fredrick J. Stare, chairman of the department of nutrition at Harvard School of Public Health, told the National Food Conference meeting in Washington, D. C.

American males past the age of 45 rank tenth in overall mortality among a list of 17 countries from which data are available. Middle-aged men in the U. S. have the highest death rate from diabetes, cardiovascular and kidney diseases of the countries studied.

Good food in the quantity to maintain desirable weight and in the proper quality to nourish the body well was one step toward longer life. This includes reducing for the obese, a high mortality factor.

Another tip to longer life is a sound, good breakfast which means at least two solids at the meal, Dr. Stare said.

Some food fallacies can be "extremely dangerous, causing people to deny themselves and their families competent medical treatment that might restore them to health," he stated.

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