

Less Hype, More Holiday

The busy holiday season can be both joyful and stressful. Demands on your time and pocketbook run high. Exercise and healthy eating routines fall apart. Sleep schedules are disrupted. Here are some tips to keep your holiday season fun, healthy and stress free.

Be realistic

The holidays don't have to be storybook perfect. As families change and grow, traditions often change as well. Talk to your spouse or partner to find what his or her expectations are for the season. Look at the traditions within your close family and your extended families and friends. Be flexible and try to blend them in a way that all of you can cherish.

Keep a lid on holiday spending.

With the added expenses of gifts, travel, food and entertainment, the holiday season can put a big strain on your finances. Make this the year you stick to your holiday budget. Before you even step foot in the stores or search for a gift online, put pen to paper to determine your overall budget and how much to expect to spend on each person on your list. Then you can start shopping within that limit. You'll find that this will keep your stress level lower, especially when you see your post-holiday bank statement.

Buying just the right gift for each individual on your list can be stressful – and expensive. An easy way to stay within your budget is to give a group gift, something a couple or an entire family will appreciate. Some ideas include:

- A family membership for a local museum
- An appliance that all can enjoy such as popcorn popper and a jar of gourmet popcorn. Or a panini press and a cookbook. Or a waffle maker, waffle mix (whole-grain of course!) and a bottle of real maple syrup
- A fun-for-the-whole-family board game like Blokus or Dixit
- A deck of cards and a book of card game rules
- Homemade bread or muffins along with a copy of your recipe.

Don't abandon healthy eating habits.

It's nearly impossible to not overeat during the season's many festivities. High-calorie, high-fat temptations are everywhere. Healthy fruits, vegetables and whole-grain foods are too often absent. The key is to find balance. Choose healthy ingredients at every opportunity. Enjoy an indulgence or two; just remember to keep portion sizes small.



Other healthy holiday eating strategies include:

- Eat something before leaving for a holiday gathering. Having some fruit or raw veggies, for example, will make you less hungry and help keep you from overindulging in cheese, crackers and cookies.
- Don't consume too many liquid calories at parties. Choose seltzer with a lemon twist rather than high-calorie soda, punch, eggnog or other cocktails.
- At home, decorate tables with bowls of easy-to-eat fruits and nuts – and encourage your guests to help themselves.
- Be sure to include a big green salad at dinners. Make it festive with ruby-red pomegranate seeds!
- Serve whole-grain rolls and breads at holiday brunches and dinners.

Combine exercise and fun.

Make an effort to find activities that get the whole family outdoors and active:

- Bundle up and take a long walks to view Christmas light displays in your community. Look online to find listings for walking neighborhood displays.
- If there's snow on the ground, pull out the toboggan and head to a sledding hill. Or build a headless snowman and take pictures of each child posing as Frosty.
- Pack the family into the car and head to an ice rink or frozen pond for a pick-up hockey game.
- No ice? Find a bowling alley, climbing wall or indoor water park for some active fun.

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Sleep well.

Being exhausted increases stress and makes you more susceptible to catching a cold. Don't shortchange yourself by not getting enough sleep during this busy time. Consider these suggestions to help get a good night's sleep:

- Avoid late-afternoon caffeine and nicotine. The stimulating effects of caffeine in energy drinks, coffee, tea, cola and chocolate can take 8 hours to wear off completely. Nicotine is also a stimulant.
- Don't drink alcohol before bedtime. A nightcap might help you fall asleep, but alcohol keeps you in the lighter stages of sleep. You also tend to wake up in the middle of the night when the effects of the alcohol have worn off.
- Take a hot bath before bed. The drop in body temperature after a bath may make you feel sleepy and the bath can help relax you.

Spread good cheer, not bad germs.

Don't let a cold, flu or other illness interrupt your holidays. Be sure to:

- Wash hands often to keep yourself from spreading germs and getting sick.
- Don't share drinks – and remind your kids to not share bottles of water or soft drinks, which increases the risk of colds, mono and the flu.
- In the kitchen, practice good food safety techniques. Remember to:
 - Wash all fruits and vegetables.
 - Keep work surfaces clean.
 - Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot.
 - Defrost frozen meats in the refrigerator, not out on the countertop, and
 - Cook foods to the proper temperature.

Prevent injury.

The hectic pace of the holidays may cause people to be less cautious and more susceptible to injury. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that about 5,800 Americans go to emergency rooms during the holiday season for treatment of fall-related injuries sustained while decorating. To avoid injury:

- Use a step stool instead of furniture when hanging decorations indoors.
- When stringing or removing outdoor lights, use a ladder safely and stay off of a wet or snowy roof.
- Don't drink and decorate!

Don't ignore symptoms of serious illness.

More people die from heart attacks on Christmas Day and New Year's Day than any other days of the year. Researchers lay the blame on patients' reluctance to disrupt celebrations and seek help. For those suffering from a heart attack or stroke, every second counts. If you see or have any of the following symptoms, immediately call 9-1-1:

- Chest discomfort or discomfort in other areas of the upper body.
- Shortness of breath.
- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body.
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding.
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes.
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause.
- Other signs may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

As the holidays quickly approach, the hype gets louder and stronger. Images of picture-perfect celebrations are everywhere. Must-have deals flood our inboxes. Schedules get more and more hectic. It's important to step back and attempt to keep the holidays as free of stress as possible. Keeping an eye on spending, staying active, eating healthy and taking precautions to not get sick will all help make your holidays memorable and enjoyable.

Sources

www.cdc.gov

www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/