

Health eNews



Holidays Don't Have to Make You Heavier

The holiday season is always extra challenging for those watching their weight, but there are ways to participate in the fun without packing on the pounds.

Julie Redfern, manager of the Nutrition Consult Services at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, recommends trying to simply maintain your weight rather than shedding pounds as a good strategy. In a news release issued by the hospital, she also offered these tips:

- Before going to a holiday party, eat a light snack. Arriving hungry often results in overindulging. Also, offer to bring your favorite healthier choice dish to ensure that you have good food options.
- Don't hang out near the food. Proximity increases temptation.
- Practice good portion control. Fill your dinner plate with half vegetables, a quarter protein and a quarter carbs. Try to avoid seconds and thirds. As for desserts, chose only those you like the most and have smaller portions.
- Reduce your fat intake by skipping the skin on turkey or chicken. Also, refrigerate gravy, then skim off the fat once it cools.
- Watch out for high-calorie holiday drinks. Enjoy just a small cup of apple cider, eggnog or the like, then balance it off with lots of water to help curb your appetite.
- Eat once, not all night. Grazing at the food table quickly piles up the calories, so instead, make a balanced plate of food just once during a party.
- When hosting a holiday party, give away your leftovers. Keep plenty of disposable dishes ready to give away sweets and other unhealthy food choices to guests.
- Focus on conversation or activities with your family and friends, rather than on food. For example, take a family walk after the main holiday meal.

More information

The American Dietetic Association has more about healthy eating, <http://www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xml/index.html>.

Holiday Safety Tips

Here's how to keep your family safe while celebrating the holiday season.



Health eNews

With another holiday season fast approaching, many of us look forward to family traditions and holiday parties. A little added caution can ensure that your holidays remain safe and healthy. Keep in mind the following tips while planning your holiday season this year.

Christmas tree and decorations

- **Make sure that the tree you buy is fresh.** If possible, cut the tree down yourself. Many tree farms let you tag a tree ahead of time and have it cut down on the day you take it home. A tree that is fresh will not lose many of its needles when shaken. Give the tree the "shake test" before you buy it. Find another if the needles are dry and falling off. The trunk of a fresh tree is sticky with resin and should not feel dry to the touch.
- **Be sure that your tree is stable** and won't fall over and injure a small child or pet. Use rope or heavy string to secure the tree if needed. Place it so that it's not blocking doorways, stairs or other exits.
- **Keep your tree away from fireplaces, wood-burning stoves, wall furnaces and heaters.** Never use lit candles to decorate your tree.
- **Beware of decorations that could be toxic.** Plants like mistletoe and holly berries can be poisonous to kids and pets. Old tinsel may contain lead. Get rid of it if you are not sure what it's made of.
- **Don't let your pet drink stagnant Christmas tree water.** It's a breeding ground for bacteria.
- **Water the tree daily.** Live trees dry out quickly in heated homes. Dispose of a live tree when the needles start falling off in large quantities.

Artificial lights and decorations

- **Buy only lights that bear a UL mark.** It means engineers have tested samples for fire and shock hazards. Lights with the green holographic UL label are for indoor use. A red UL mark means the lights can be used either inside or out.
- **Before stringing the lights on the tree, make sure they are in working order.** Discard any lights that have frayed wires or broken sockets. Don't use more than three standard-size sets of lights per extension cord or you may overload electrical circuits.
- **Turn off all tree lights when you are away or in bed.** The lights could short out and start a fire. Try putting the lights on a timer to go off at bedtime.
- **Take down outdoor lighting when the holiday season is finished.** Lighting should not be exposed to outside elements for long periods of time.

Using a fireplace

- **Before using your fireplace, remove all hazards.** This includes decorations and ornaments on the mantle that may be hanging too close to the fire. Also, your tree should be nowhere near the fire.
- **Check to see if your chimney needs cleaning.** Once you're ready, make sure the flue is open. The fireplace opening should be completely covered by a screen, too.
- **Never burn anything but wood in your fireplace.** Wrappings and evergreen branches can burn very quickly, throwing off sparks and burning debris.
- **Have a working fire extinguisher in your home, and make sure your family members know how to use it.** Also, make the holiday season your regular time to check your smoke detectors.



Health eNews

Go Green This Holiday Season

Don't let holiday stress crowd out your good intentions. Here are some ways to stay "green" through the season of giving.

No doubt you have good intentions. You're probably using compact-fluorescent light bulbs. You try to remember to "reduce, reuse, recycle." But when the holidays come, it's easy to fall back into old habits and forget about being green.

It's even more important to make green choices during the holiday season. An estimated one million tons of extra garbage is produced in the U.S. each week between Thanksgiving and New Year's. You can do your part to cut the waste, and you may even save money. Now that's something to celebrate.

8 Tips for Greener Holidays

1. **Take your own bags.** Get some sturdy canvas, mesh or nylon shopping bags and take them when you do your holiday shopping. For large items, skip bagging if you can.
2. **Look for the Energy Star.** Products with the Energy Star rating have met strict energy-efficiency standards, so they use less energy and save money. Energy Star rates an array of products, from light bulbs to TVs to large appliances.
3. **Buy recycled.** Items with recycled content help cut down on consumer waste. A wide variety of glassware, jewelry, paper products and even clothing is made with recycled materials.
4. **Think outside the box.** Instead of a gift that can break or wear out, give tickets to a concert, play or sports event. Present a coupon good for an evening of babysitting or knitting lessons.
5. **Be a green wrapper.** Most wrapping paper can't be recycled, so it ends up in the trash. Make your own wrapping paper from the Sunday comic pages, maps, catalog pages or brown paper bags. Wrap gifts in fabric and tie with ribbon or lace. Or buy gift bags, tins or baskets and reuse them each year. According to the Sierra Club, if every family did this with just three presents, it would save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields.
6. **Decorate with LED lights.** LED lights use 90 percent less energy than standard holiday lights, and they last longer, too. They may cost a little more up front, but they pay for themselves in a year or two.
7. **Recycle your tree.** Many cities have tree recycling during the holidays. Check with your local recycling program to find out about pick-up or drop-off options.



Health eNews

8. **Recycle old electronics.** You got the new cell phone you wished for. But now, what do you do with your old cell phone? Or the iPod that went through the wash, or the rechargeable battery that no longer holds a charge? Recycle them. Recyclers recover millions of pounds of copper and precious metals from electronics every year. Recycling cuts pollution created by making new products, conserves resources and keeps hazardous materials out of landfill.

To recycle consumer electronics:

- Drop them off at local stores. Best Buy, Office Depot, Staples and other large retailers provide drop boxes for old cell phones, PDAs, rechargeable batteries and other items.
- Return them to manufacturers. Many provide mail-in or drop-off recycling for used electronics, including HP, Palm, Verizon, AT&T and Nokia. Some will take larger items such as TVs and computers, even ones made by other manufacturers.
- Donate them. Some schools have electronics recycling programs that raise money for activities. Check with your local school district to find out if a school in your area has a program.

To learn more about electronics recycling (eCycling), go to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Web site at www.epa.gov and type "ecycling" in the search box.

Holiday Stress

Holidays may bring joy to some people, but for others they can mean a time of stress. We sometimes expect too much from the holiday season. It isn't always full of warm relationships, exciting activity and an abundance of presents, good food and cheer.

We can pay a high price trying to achieve holiday joy. Our energy and money may become exhausted. Then, stress levels begin to rise. Do your holidays turn out to be disappointing because stress gets the best of you? These tips may help you change some old holiday habits:

Spend Sensibly

- Don't shop impulsively. Follow a budget.
- Limit your gift giving to those closest to you.
- Make homemade gifts such as cookies or crafts.



Health eNews

- Give coupons for your services such as baby-sitting or yard work.

Eat, Drink and Be Smart

- When shopping, bring along fruit to snack. Avoid high-calorie fast foods.
- Prepare nutritious, low-fat meals. This can balance out the inevitable holiday goodies.
- Keep meals simple so you don't spend all your time and energy in the kitchen.
- If you decide to drink alcohol, limit yourself to a moderate amount. And, don't drink and drive.

It's a Family Affair

- Don't try to solve a year's worth of family problems during one holiday get-together.
- You can't please everyone, so don't try.
- If visits are stressful, keep them short whenever possible.
- If it's too stressful to attend family holiday events, plan to visit another time.

Take Care of Yourself

- Get enough sleep. The holidays can be exhausting.
- Exercise for an energy boost—to burn extra calories and keep stress in check.
- Don't skip meals when you're on the run.
- Set realistic expectations for the holidays. Leave the guilt behind.

Focus on Meaning

- Remind yourself of the cultural or spiritual meaning of the holidays.
- Try to value the time you spend with friends and loved ones.
- Decide what you enjoy doing most this time of year. Then, do it!

Check Baby's Toys for Safety

Avoid playthings that can cause injury

When choosing toys for your baby or toddler, make sure you inspect them carefully for things that could cause injury.

The American Academy of Family Physicians offers these guidelines when choosing safe toys:

- Make sure each toy is sturdy, well-made, and appropriate for your child's age.
- Don't let your baby play with toys that have sharp edges or points, or small parts.



Health eNews

- Make sure parts fit securely and are not loose.
- Read labels to check for safety information. Look for toys that are non-toxic, washable and hygienic.

Don't let your baby play with any toys that are smaller than 1 3/4 inches in diameter or 2 inches long, as these may pose a choking hazard.

Hosting a Safe New Year's Eve Party

America's number-one party night is almost here. Not to dampen your holiday spirit (it is your last chance to whoop it up before tending to those New Year's resolutions), but the point is to see in the New Year. That means surviving the Eve.

Alcohol is the common thread in deadly New Year's Eve partying. Young people are especially at risk. Alcohol-related highway crashes are the leading cause of death for teens and the young - but no one is immune. There is one alcohol-related death every 31 minutes, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The agency offers these tips to party throwers:

- **Avoid making alcohol the main focus of social events.** Entertain guests with music, dancing, games, food and conversation.
- **Offer plenty of non-alcoholic beverage choices**, including sparkling water, fancy juice drinks, soft drinks and bottled water.
- **Provide guests with nutritious and appealing foods** to slow the effects of alcohol. High-protein and high-carbohydrate foods - such as cheese and meat - are great. Avoid salty foods, which encourage people to drink more.
- **Stop serving drinks at least an hour before the end of the event.** Instead, serve coffee, non-alcoholic beverages and desserts.
- **Before the party, recruit people who won't be drinking** to help make sure your guests get home safely.
- **Don't let anyone who has been drinking drive.** Offer your guest room or couch for the night, call a cab or ask someone else to drive your guest home. If the drinker insists on driving, take the keys or temporarily disable the car. If all else fails, say you will call the police (and follow through if you have to).

Your Good Health Travel Kit

Whether you're traveling for business or pleasure, it's easy to forget the little things you may need. As you pack, be sure to always include items that can help you stay healthy and feel your best.

Tailor your kit to your destination, length of stay and individual health concerns. Keep the items in a large ziplock bag. It can serve



Health eNews

as an ice-pack in a pinch. If you travel frequently, replenish your stock as needed.

Nonprescription medications to include:

- Acetaminophen
- Antibiotic ointment
- Diarrhea/constipation medications
- Allergy/sinus tablets
- Nose spray or drops
- Motion sickness medications
- Antacids
- Antifungal agent
- Cold sore balm
- Calamine lotion

Other helpful items to pack:

- Prescription medications
- Bandages in various sizes
- Vitamins
- Extra eyeglasses or contact lenses
- Contact lens care items
- Denture repair supplies
- Insect repellent
- Sunscreen and sunglasses
- Tweezers
- Contraceptives

Travel Smart

If you have special health care needs, don't forget equipment such as a blood glucose meter with test strips, an inhaler, etc. You also should wear shoes that are already broken in. And, keep prescription medication, eyeglasses and some basic health care items in a hand-carried bag. If you can't do without something for a few days, don't put it in luggage that could get lost.

Stay Healthy

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water. Or, use alcohol based cleaner, if necessary.
- Water purity is a concern in some places. Boil water, use purifying tablets, or drink only bottled or canned beverages. And, don't use ice.
- Only eat food that has been fully cooked. Eat fruits and vegetables only if they've been washed and peeled by you. Remember—boil it, cook it, peel it or forget it.
- Avoid undercooked meats and unpasteurized milk.



Health eNews

Healthy Eating on a Budget

How to eat healthy without relying on expensive health food stores

You know you should improve your diet, but "health foods" always seem to cost more. It is possible to have a nutritious diet on a reasonable budget? Must you shop at expensive health food stores to eat well?

Certainly not! Follow these simple tips below, and your budget-conscious ways may also lead to fewer medical bills and prescriptions. A healthy body is the best bargain of all.

Buy in bulk

- Buy large portions, divide into individual servings and freeze. This works well for lean meats and poultry.
- Buy in bulk at chains like Sam's Club or Costco. They have whole-grain cereals, soups, sauces, pasta, meats, fruits and vegetables at much lower cost than regular markets.
- Many health food stores/co-ops have bulk sections where you can buy rice, beans, oatmeal, nuts and other grains for much less than prepackaged products.
- When available, buy bags of fruit instead of individual pieces by the pound.
- Avoid snack traps like 100-calorie packs. Make your own single-serving portions with mini snack bags.

Cook and store in bulk

- Make dishes on the weekends that you can eat during the week, or freeze and use at a later date. A big bowl of bean soup or chili can be dinner as well as lunch for the next day or two.
- This saves on expensive frozen dinners or take-out food, trips to the cafeteria and last-minute detours to the drive-through window.

Manage the meat

- Look for lean meat, poultry and fish on sale, and freeze for later use.
- Trade lean meats for other protein sources sometimes.
- Beans, tofu and eggs are excellent protein choices and good alternatives to pricier animal protein.

Be season-savvy

- Seasonal fruits and vegetables taste best and are often much less pricey than imported out-of-season varieties.
- Look for reduced produce in the supermarket. It is usually only a day or two old, but much less expensive.
- Visit local farmers and ethnic markets, where produce is often cheap and fresh.
- Go generic. Generic or store brands offer great savings and typically, are just as nutritious as their costlier counterparts.



Health eNews

Convenience counts

- If you find your produce often goes bad, try frozen options. Look for products packed in their own juice, or made without salt or sugar.
- Stock up on low-cost staples, such as brown rice, barley, dried or canned beans and whole-wheat pasta. These are great for stretching meals at little cost. Add brown rice to a canned vegetable soup, or mix lean ground beef with rinsed canned beans and whole-wheat elbow noodles.

Plan ahead

- Menu planning will help you reduce any waste of produce and other fresh foods.
- Research shows that shoppers without a list tend to buy more food, especially of the snacking variety!
- Don't go to the store hungry. Being hungry will weaken your resolve. You'll be more tempted to indulge in items that are unhealthy and more costly.

Limit junk food

- Ice cream, chips, cookies and prepared frozen foods can add up to be the most expensive things in your cart.
- Trade the money you spend on junk for fresh avocados, luscious grape tomatoes and crunchy apples. All are delicious and totally natural.

