



# Family Ties

## How About Your Turkey?

Purchasing, preparing, and serving a turkey can be a daunting task. There are lots of great resources available to help you make your turkey dinner safe and delicious. The website [holidayfoodsafety.org](http://holidayfoodsafety.org) provides specific helps for your turkey adventures:



### ***Purchasing the Turkey***

**Be prepared!** Before purchasing your turkey, make ample space in your refrigerator, moving shelves if necessary.

**Fresh or frozen?** There is no quality difference between a fresh or frozen turkey although fresh turkeys have shorter shelf lives. By purchasing a frozen turkey, you can get the turkey in advance and take advantage of special sales. Fresh turkeys provide convenience because they do not require thawing.

**What size turkey do I need to buy?** When purchasing a whole turkey, purchase at least one pound of uncooked turkey per person. You'll have enough for the feast and for leftovers too.

**When should I buy it?** Keep in mind that a whole turkey takes about 24 hours per four to five pounds to thaw in the refrigerator. (For example: A 15-pound frozen bird will take 3 to 4 full days to thaw in the refrigerator.) Ideally, purchase your frozen turkey as far in advance as necessary to safely thaw it in the refrigerator. If buying a fresh turkey, purchase it only 1 to 2 days before the meal and keep it refrigerated.

### ***Thawing and handling***

Always wash hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling the turkey.

**Never defrost turkey on the counter!** Turkey can be thawed in the refrigerator or in cold water. The refrigerator method is the safest and will result in the best finished product. Leave the bird in the original packaging and place in a shallow pan and allow refrigerator thawing time at a rate of 4 to 5 pounds per 24 hours. To thaw in cold water, keep turkey in the original packaging, place in a clean and sanitized sink or pan and submerge in cold water. Change the cold water every 30 minutes. The turkey will take about 30 minutes per pound to thaw. Cook the turkey immediately after it is thawed. Do not refreeze.

**Now what?** Once thawed, remove neck and giblets from the body cavities and keep bird and parts (if using) refrigerated at 40 °F or below until it is ready to be cooked.

Complied by:

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# Turkey Cooking Time and Temperature

**Time to cook.** There are several methods for cooking your turkey. The single most important thing to know, no matter the cooking method, is that the turkey must be cooked to the proper internal temperature as measured with a food thermometer. A stuffed turkey will take additional time to cook.



**Stuff safely.** Stuffing should be prepared and stuffed into the turkey immediately before it's placed in the oven. Mix the wet and dry ingredients for the stuffing separately and combine just before using. Stuff the turkey loosely, about 3/4 cup stuffing per pound of turkey. Bake any extra stuffing in a greased casserole dish. Cooked inside or outside the bird, all stuffing and dressing recipes must be cooked to a minimum temperature of 165 °F. (For optimum safety and more even cooking, it's recommended to cook your stuffing in a casserole dish.)

**Take the temperature! !** Insert a meat thermometer into the thickest part of the thigh, not touching bone. Cook to a minimum internal temperature of 165 °F as measured with a food thermometer. Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. For reasons of personal preference, cook turkey to higher temperatures but not to exceed 170 °F in the breast and 180 °F in the thigh. (If the turkey is done and the stuffing is not yet 165 °F, remove the stuffing from the turkey and place it in a greased casserole dish to continue cooking to temperature.) Use the timetable below to estimate approximate cooking time.

## Thermal/Conventional Oven Open Pan Method Timetable for Roasting a Turkey at 325 °F.

Unstuffed Turkey	
8 to 12 pounds	2-3/4 to 3 hours
12 to 14 pounds	3 to 3-3/4 hours
14 to 18 pounds	3-3/4 to 4-1/4 hours
18 to 20 pounds	4-1/4 to 4-1/2 hours
20 to 24 pounds	4-1/2 to 5 hours
Stuffed Turkey	
8 to 12 pounds	3 to 3-1/2 hours
12 to 14 pounds	3-1/2 to 4 hours
14 to 18 pounds	4 to 4-1/4 hours
18 to 20 pounds	4-1/4 to 4-3/4 hours
20 to 24 pounds	4-3/4 to 5-1/4 hours

## Convection Oven Open Pan Method Roasting Guidelines for a Fresh/Thawed Turkey at 300 °F.

Unstuffed Turkey	
14 to 18 pounds	2-1/2 to 3-1/4 hours
18 to 22 pounds	3-1/4 to 3-1/2 hours
Stuffed Turkey	
14 to 18 pounds	3 to 3-1/4 hours
18 to 22 pounds	3-1/4 to 3-3/4 hours

### Safe carving and serving.

It's best to let the turkey rest for 20 minutes before carving to allow the juices to set, so the turkey will carve more easily. Use a clean cutting board that has a well to catch juices. Remove all stuffing from the turkey cavity. Make sure your knife is sharp before you start carving. Do not leave any extra turkey, stuffing or other leftovers out for more than two hours.

### Storing leftovers safely.

Remove the stuffing and carve the extra turkey meat from the bones. Within two hours, store leftover turkey in shallow containers and put in the refrigerator or the freezer. Use cooked leftover turkey, stuffing and gravy within 3-4 days. Cooked turkey keeps for 3-4 months in the freezer. When using leftovers, reheat the foods thoroughly to 165 °F or until hot and steaming; bring gravy to a boil before serving.

# Stay Healthy this Holiday Season

## *Simple Steps to Avoid the Flu...*



It's **Fall** - once again it's time to think about ways you can help your family avoid the flu! This year, people are more aware of the flu than ever before due to the emergence of an additional flu strain: H<sub>1</sub>N<sub>1</sub> (also called "swine flu"). News stories can make the spread of the flu sound inevitable; however, there are practical steps you can take to reduce your family's risk of illness. These steps are also an important part of helping to reduce the spread of illness to those around you.

### Hand Washing

- Hand washing is a simple and effective way to prevent illness.
- Frequent hand washing is encouraged for everyone, particularly after: using the bathroom, blowing your nose, coughing, sneezing, touching pets or other animals, changing a diaper or helping a child use the bathroom, handling garbage or contaminated items and before preparing or eating food.
- Wash hands with warm water and soap for ~20 seconds. Rinse well and dry with disposable paper towels or individual hand cloths (sharing towels can encourage the spread of illness).
- When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers are an effective alternative. Apply a generous amount to palms and rub hands together thoroughly until dry.



### General Prevention

- Cover nose or mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough. Throw the tissue away when you are done.
- Try to avoid touching your nose, eyes or mouth. This is a common way that illness is spread.
- Clean hands after using shared items in high traffic areas such as doorknobs, telephones, gas pumps, etc.
- As much as possible, avoid contact with others who are sick. When this is unavoidable, wash hands frequently.
- If you or your children are sick, stay home from school or work to reduce the spread of illness. (This is recommended until you have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine. A fever is defined as 100°F or greater.)
- Follow public health recommendations on school closings and exposure precautions.



## Seasonal Flu Vaccination

- The annual flu season runs from November to April. It is recommended that you get a flu shot between September and December to help prevent infection and/or diminish symptoms of the annual circulating flu.
- The flu vaccine is offered as either an injection or nasal spray.
- Individuals typically at higher risk for seasonal flu include those over the age of 65, pregnant women, children under the age of five and people with chronic medical conditions or a compromised immune system.
- The seasonal flu vaccine is not expected to offer protection against the H<sub>1</sub>N<sub>1</sub> flu virus.
- Vaccination is available through medical offices as well as several pharmacy clinics and public vaccination drives.

## H<sub>1</sub>N<sub>1</sub> Flu Vaccination

- This flu season is unique due to an early rise in cases of the new H<sub>1</sub>N<sub>1</sub> flu virus.
- Individuals showing higher susceptibility to the H<sub>1</sub>N<sub>1</sub> flu virus include children, pregnant women and people with chronic medical conditions.
- The H<sub>1</sub>N<sub>1</sub> vaccine (both injections and nasal spray) became available in October of this year. Priority vaccination will be given to the following target groups:
  - Pregnant women
  - Caregivers of infants under 6 months of age
  - Health care and medical personnel
  - Children and young adults 6 months to 24 years of age
  - People aged 25-64 years who have medical conditions that put them at higher risk of the flu.
- Once the target groups have been served, vaccination will open up to others.



## What about the Cost?

- Check with your insurance provider to determine if these vaccines are covered.
- Some insurance carriers that did not previously cover the flu vaccine are making special arrangements due to the expectation of a heavy flu season.

*For emerging information and recommendations concerning the flu, visit: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)*

*Sources: Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the Immunization Action Coalition  
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# Talking With Your Children About the Flu



Every fall and winter we are advised to get the flu shot and to take actions to prevent getting the seasonal flu. This year there is a new flu bug making the rounds, Novel H1N1 Flu (sometimes called Swine Flu). This flu bug has hit earlier than seasonal flu, and it seems to cause more serious problems for children and young adults than for older adults. The news media focus on deaths of children which causes distress for both parents and children.

How can you talk with your children about this without causing undue alarm? Here are some tips provided by the Centers for Disease Control to reduce the amount of distress for children.

- Keep routines as normal as possible. Even if schools or childcare facilities close because of illness, try to maintain a normal routine at home. Try to go to bed, get up, and eat meals at regular times, and maintain other routines as you can.
- Ask your children what they have heard about H1N1 flu. Answer their questions as honestly as you can. Use words they can understand. Children will have less fear if they think you are not hiding things from them.
- Let children express their worries and fears. Let them know it is okay to have those feelings.
- Give them lots of love and affection. This can help them feel safe and secure.
- Try to limit their exposure to media or conversations about the flu that could cause them alarm. If children are watching TV, watch with them and be available to answer questions they may have.
- Encourage them to practice good health behaviors such as hand washing, getting enough rest, eating well, and staying active.

Teach your children things they can do to avoid getting or spreading the flu.

- Wash hand frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds (the amount of time it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song twice).
- Cough and sneeze into a tissue and throw it away immediately.
- Keep your hands away from your face and mouth and don't put other objects such as toys or pencils in your mouth.
- Stay at least six feet away from people who are sick.
- If you get sick, stay home from school or childcare until you get well.

The best way you can teach children is by example. Do the things you want your children to do. The tips listed above make good sense during any cold and flu season. Practice and teach these good health habits to keep yourself and your children calm and healthy.

You can go directly to the Centers for Disease Control website and get information about talking with your children at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/talkingtokids.htm>

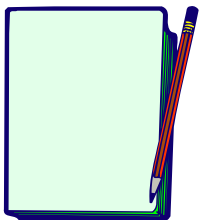
Compiled by:  
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# The Thankful Box



One of the best gifts a parent or caregiver can give a child is the gift of thankfulness. By giving someone a gift we show our love and appreciation for them and in return thanking someone for that gift shows our gratitude-not really just for the gift-but for the love. As the holiday season is upon us it offers a multitude of opportunities to teach our children about expressing gratitude. It has been long embraced that gratitude goes far in helping maintain our immune system, emotional health, and an overall optimistic attitude toward life. Gratitude and thankfulness also allows us not to take things for granted. What a gift to pass on to those we love. Especially in hard times it is good to take stock of all the things that we are thankful for and those things often taken for granted become more apparent.

One family project to work on during the month of November is to introduce the 'thankful box.' The thankful box can be any type of box-a large shoe box will serve well. Have children wrap or decorate the box. Cut a slit or rectangular hole in the lid of the box and have the children wrap or decorate it. Place the lid on the box. Place a stack of small pieces of paper or index cards by the thankful box. You can add a supply of pens, crayons, markers, stickers, etc to write and decorate with by the box.



Then gather your family to discuss what the 'thankful box' is about. Each family member can throughout the month of November write or draw what they are thankful for on a piece of paper or index card and slip it into the box. They can do one or several each day or just whenever they think of something. Tell the family that no one can look in the box until Thanksgiving Day. On Thanksgiving set aside a special time whether before or after a meal or some other time that is special for your family and gather everyone around. Pass the box and have each person read or share what is on the slip that they draw from the box.

This is a wonderful way to affirm the love that your family feels for one another and to express gratitude for those little things that we often overlook. When the holidays are over you can simply place all the supplies in the box and store it for next year's holiday season as it will be looked forward to again and again!

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# Credit Cost May Rise During the Holidays



## Credit Card Companies Anticipate New Regulations in Early 2010

Consumers planning to use credit cards for holiday purchases should be aware that some credit card companies may be charging additional interest and fees over the holidays. These additional charges take advantage of the final few months before the new federal regulations on credit cards go into effect at the end of February, 2010.

The Credit Card Accountability, Responsibility and Disclosure (CARD) act, signed into law by the President in May 2009, was the most significant piece of credit protection legislation for consumers since the 1960s. Provisions related to 45-day prior notice of interest rate increases went into effect in September 2009. Most provisions, however, will not go into effect until February 22, 2010. Under the new regulations:

- Retroactive interest rate increases will be prohibited unless an account is more than 60 days overdue. Retroactive interest currently allows credit card companies to raise interest on charges previously made under a lesser interest rate. For example, if your credit card balance is \$600, and the credit card company wants to increase interest, the increase currently applies to the \$600 plus any new charges. After the act goes into effect, interest rate increases can only be applied to new charges.
- If a penalty rate increase is accessed because of a late payment, the interest rate must be returned to the previous rate after the cardholder's payments are current for 6 months.
- After a cardholder gets a new card, the interest rate cannot increase for a year. In the case of a promotional rate, the promotional rate must be in effect at least 6 months.
- The cardholder must be notified at least 45 days in advance of significant changes in credit card terms.
- Universal default and double-cycle billing will be prohibited. Under universal default, if a cardholder is late paying one card, interest rates can be increased on the cardholder's other cards. Double-cycle billing allows credit card companies to figure interest on the average balance over a two-month, rather than one month period to maximize the amount on which the cardholder pays interest.
- Cardholders will be able to avoid over the limit fees by electing to have charges that would put them over the limit denied at the point of purchase.
- Under the new legislation, billings will have to be mailed at least 21 days before they are due, and payment received by 5 P.M. on the due date must be credited to that day's payment. Late payment deadlines and postmark dates are also required to be clearly shown on the statement.
- Credit card statements must also clearly show how long it would take to pay off a credit card balance if cardholder makes only the minimum payment each month. Statements must also show the total cost in interest and principal payments if a cardholder makes only the minimum payment each month.
- Young people under the age of 21 must have an adult co-signer or show proof of adequate income for repayment before they can be issued a card. Credit card companies will not be able to make "pre-approval" offers of credit cards to young people under the age of 21 unless they specifically opt-in for offers.
- Young people requiring co-signers will be required to receive permission from parents or guardians in order to increase credit limit on joint accounts they hold with those adults.

As always, the best plan is to charge only what you can pay for at the end of the month, and pay your credit card bill in full well before its due date.

# Teens Experience Holiday Stress and the Blues



Holiday stress and the blues effects many adults during the winter holidays. However, adults don't always realize that teens get these feelings, too. The same things can cause these feelings for teens as they do for adults:

- Hectic schedule
- Financial stress
- Increased family conflict or misunderstanding
- Crowds
- Pressure to live up to idealized images of holidays and family life
- Changes in diet and routines
- Cabin fever
- Pressure to find the perfect gifts
- Not getting the gifts you wanted
- Other unmet expectations
- Increased grief about divorce, death, or other family changes (see below)
- Shortened amount of daylight (a cause of serious depression for many<sup>1</sup>)

Also, many teens feel empty because holidays are not the same as when they were young kids. All on top of the normal stresses of growing up! Feeling stressed or getting the blues during the holidays is normal. Some simple steps can help ease the feelings for your teen and get them through the season.

## Help your teens manage their feelings. Encourage them...

- **To talk.** Help them express their feelings. Really listen to them. Try not to judge them or overreact. Instead, help them try to solve their problems. Encourage them to talk to other trusted adults or friends, too.
- **To take a break.** Getting away from others can be refreshing. Encourage them to spend time relaxing or doing an activity for themselves. Just spending a few minutes outside can re-energize them.

- **To exercise.** This is one of the best ways to work off stress.
- **To eat right.** Holidays often come with sugary and high-fat foods. Eating some is fine, but eating too much will only make mood swings worse.
- **To do something charitable.** It can be easy to lose sight of what the holidays are really about. Doing something for someone else can help change one's outlook.

## Manage your own stress and blues, too.

- If you are feeling stressed or sad yourself, your children may be picking up on your feelings. You can help them by taking care of yourself. Plus, they learn from watching you. If you handle your feelings well, they will learn to handle their own feelings better.

In addition to the steps above...

- **Cut back on your schedule.** Learn to say no to some activities.
- **Plan ahead.** Be realistic and prioritize. Allow extra time, in case things don't go as planned.
- **Work out schedules together, as a family.** Give everyone a chance to express what they want. Be clear about your expectations of each other. Try to schedule some time apart, too.

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For More Information Contact  
Your County Extension Office





# Helping Your Child Manage Holiday Stress

If you think the holidays are stressful for you, they're doubly so for children. Not only do children pick up on their parents' stress from holiday preparations, they are also less able to cope with excitement and interruption from their daily routine. Learn some tips for how you can reduce holiday stress for your children.

## Why holidays are stressful for children

Children cope with excitement and emotions differently than adults. While some kids can adapt to schedule changes, others have a hard time coping with a change in their routine.

Children easily become exhausted from excitement. While excitement is wonderful, the anticipation, gifts and parties are also tiring.

Young children don't fully understand the meaning of a holiday. It might take a few holidays for your child to understand the meaning and traditions. Keep your plans simple to help your child understand what's happening and why.

## Tips to reduce holiday stress for your children

- Decide your family's priorities. A lot of our memories come from holiday events. Think back to what you remember. Was it playing games with your family? Helping your mother decorate cookies, chopping down your own live Christmas tree, visiting a relative in a nursing home? You typically don't remember whether the house was spotless or that you got every present on your list. So....how do you want to spend your time?
- Set reasonable expectations and limits. The holidays are full of unrealistic expectations and messages in the media about the "warmth and family togetherness" of the holidays. Set realistic expectations and do not be lulled into the unrealistic "fireplace and hot chocolate" pictures.
- Maintain your child's routines. Keep regular meal times and bed times. Hungry or sleep-deprived kids become cranky kids.

- Don't force youngsters to sit on Santa's lap if they're afraid. You might stand next to Santa with your child.

## Setting your family's holiday priorities

Decide your family's priorities for this holiday season by ranking your top 5 activities or traditions:

- Religious or spiritual traditions
- Time with immediate family
- Time with extended family
- Parties with friends or co-workers
- Baking or cooking
- Relaxation
- Buying gifts
- Wrapping gifts
- Selecting a tree
- Visiting friends or relatives
- Decorating
- Donating time, money or items to the needy
- Writing and sending holiday cards
- Holiday concerts, plays or events
- Viewing holiday lights
- Other

Remember – children of all ages have feelings too! Don't forget as you are huffing and puffing around the malls this holiday season that your child still needs that special attention each and every day. Don't forget to provide them an extra hug and read an extra book at night. It will help both of you ....smile!

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# Celebrating the Holidays as a Blended Family



Blended families have unique challenges during any holiday time. Unresolved feelings, animosity, and mixed loyalties can sidetrack what should be a happy time. A blended family is one in which at least one adult has a child or children from a former relationship. If you are one of the growing numbers of blended families, consider these suggestions as you face the holidays.

**Be flexible.** Do you really need to celebrate a given holiday on its official date? Do all family members need to be together on a particular holiday? Don't get into a power struggle with former spouses and other family members about where the children will spend the holiday. If you have a flexible mind set, you'll discover many ways to celebrate holidays. Perhaps you'll celebrate Christmas the weekend before or on New Year's Day. Flexibility eases the stress on everyone. Whatever your arrangement, after doing it for a year or two, you will have a new family tradition.

**Encourage expression of feelings.** Share feelings sensitively without interrupting others or trying to fix problems. You may not agree with everything other family members say, but others will appreciate you listening to them and taking their needs into account. Allow time and space for the children whose other parent is not present, to express sadness, regret, or guilt. Give them permission to enjoy themselves with the parent they visit.

**Plan ahead.** Discuss options and plans in advance of holidays. Share ideas and let everyone voice their opinions. Avoid unrealistic expectations and keep the plan simple. Making decisions based on these opinions may be difficult, but by planning ahead everyone can better anticipate what to expect.

**Avoid competition.** In blended families, stepparents, former spouses, grandparents, and other adults may compete for time and the attention of the children. This can result in children modeling the behavior of the adults and striving for the attention of others. This type of competition damages family well-being and creates an air of tension.

**Avoid over-commitment.** Three holiday meals on one day are too much for anyone to handle. This is an example of just one way blended families may over-commit. Keep activities manageable and enjoyable. End family celebrations before fatigue sets in, and plan so everyone leaves relaxed and content. If gifts are shared, be thoughtful and fair. Don't spend more than you can afford.

**Rise above animosity.** Keep your cool. Children in blended families are relieved and adjust best when adults are pleasant to one another. Children may not care when, where, or how they celebrate a holiday if everyone gets along with each other.

**Enjoy the uniqueness of your family.** Expect your blended family to be very different from a first-marriage family. Appreciate the advantages of this family and the strengths of each person in it. Realize that kids will be kids and adults will occasionally be immature no matter what the family make up. All families have struggles. Look for the good in your family and express appreciation to other family members. Do this until it becomes a habit.

**Keep smiling and maintain a sense of humor.** Blending a family has many challenges. Avoid the tendency to bring the heaviness of the past into the present. Talk through it and let it go. For old and young alike, gloom disperses when someone gets silly, breaks a smile, or makes a funny comment. Have fun. Let the past stay in the past and enjoy the present.

# "Making a List: Checking It Twice!"



Christmas inevitably involves the creation, maintenance, and consultation of lists - from Christmas card lists, to invitation lists, to the all-important shopping lists. It seems there is always more to be accomplished than time allows, but parents usually manage to do it all—ensuring for their children the wonder and magic that is Christmas.

Far too often, though, in the happy rush of yuletide celebration, safety considerations are overlooked and seasonal dangers come to roost in the family home. When constructing those holiday lists, insist on including a safety checklist, the perennial holiday "must have."

The holiday season is responsible for a dramatic spike in the number of home fires. As many as 47,000 American homes experience blazes during the months of November and December, accounting for 500 fatalities and 2,200 injuries. Not surprisingly, holiday traditions gone awry are usually to blame. Fire prevention pointers for that holiday list include:



Both the selection and maintenance of Christmas trees require special attention. Live trees should be as green and fresh as possible; freshness can be observed by thumping the tree trunk lightly against the ground. A cascade of dropping needles indicates that the tree has not been cut recently. Also, note the texture of the tree's trunk; a fresh tree's base will feel slightly sticky to the touch, as recent cutting activates the flow of resin. After purchasing the freshest possible tree, at least one inch should be trimmed from the bottom of the trunk before placing the tree in its holder. To ensure the tree is watered sufficiently (thereby minimizing fire hazard), at least one gallon of water should be added on day one, with another quart or more added daily.

Christmas tree placement is also a crucial safety consideration. Avoid placing the tree near a fireplace, heat vent, or other heating source. Having determined a safe location, make certain the tree is placed in a stand sturdy enough for its size. Decorative lights should be examined for safety before stringing on the tree. Any light strands that reveal frayed wires or other signs of wear should be discarded. Note also that Christmas light strands sometimes contain lead (as a fire retardant). For this reason, only adults should handle lights, and they should thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water afterwards.

The overloading of extension cords and electrical circuits is often to blame for holiday fires. Pay strict attention to power consumption of any electrical lighting; the wattage should be noted on the original packaging. Be certain that cords are not concealed under carpet or other materials and that they do not pose trip hazards. Always unplug all cords when the tree is not attended.



Christmas candles pose another common holiday fire threat. Children are drawn to their cheery flames and alluring scents and often unwittingly approach them as playthings. Adults, in the rush of festivities, forget to extinguish them or place them in proximity to paper or other flammables. Choose candle placement wisely, and ensure that illuminated candles are not accessible to pets or children. Check candles frequently and extinguish thoroughly when leaving the room.



The family fireplace is never so popular as at Christmastime. Beware, however, of adorning the hearth or nearby floor space with holiday décor. Keep wrapped gifts, ornaments, and other items at a distance from the fireplace. Resist, as well, burning fragrant, but dangerous, pine branches, as pine needles ignite violently and spew sparks outward. Wrapping paper and cardboard are also highly flammable and should never be relegated to the fire.

When practical, use only natural logs, and always avoid stacking artificial logs in the fireplace. Artificial logs require special handling; always obey package instructions.

Be certain the fireplace damper is open before laying a fire and that fireplace mesh screens are closed and glass doors open while a fire is in progress. Fires should be extinguished completely before leaving the house or retiring for the evening.



Family traditions are a cherished part of the holidays. Why not include a family *safety* tradition on that list? The safe home includes smoke detectors on each floor and inside every bedroom. While purchasing those ubiquitous holiday batteries, buy a sufficient supply to replace those in smoke detectors. Also, establish a date to test your family's fire escape plan during late November or early December. It can be a fun occasion, with Christmas cookies and hot cocoa to conclude the newest family tradition.

Peace of mind, like peace on earth, is the goal of every family at Christmas. A safety checklist can help.

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# Avoid Holiday Weight Gain

Facing the bounty of food that often comes with the holiday season, are you worried you'll pack on pounds between now and the New Year? Don't be. You can balance your calories and still enjoy all your holiday favorites.

Most importantly, don't let your exercise program take a holiday. The hustle and bustle of the holiday season may make it hard to stick to your workout routine, but always make exercise a priority. Good options include walking, biking, running, ice skating or stair climbing. **Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity most days of the week.**

How do you know your activity of moderate intensity? With moderate intensity activities, you will increase your breathing rate and you will perspire. If you don't currently have a physical activity routine, there is no time like the present to get started.



## Holiday Home Chefs

Are you the one who gets stuck in the kitchen every holiday season while your family and friends are enjoying each other's company in the living room? It doesn't need to be that way. Plan a menu of casseroles, breads, soups and other dishes that can be prepared ahead of time and refrigerated or frozen. Separate your menu into dishes that require oven time and those that need roasting. Baked items like pies, cakes, cookies and breads need time to cool, but roasted dishes are usually served hot. So bake first and roast second. Set the table the day before and during the event, enlist volunteers to take turns watching the oven. You'll be able to serve a great meal and celebrate with your guests.

## Holiday Meals Can be Healthy Meals

The holiday season may bring visions of candy, cookies and chocolate, but some traditional holiday foods can leave you guilt-free. Nuts, dates, figs and dried fruit are popular holiday treats and can provide significant health benefits, too. Nuts are a source of fat but generally contain unsaturated fat, making them healthier choices. Nuts such as pecans, walnuts, almonds make a healthy snack. Use nuts in casseroles, on salads or in cookies and cakes. Dried fruit, especially cherries, cranberries and apricots, are rich in phytochemicals—plant compounds that aid in the prevention of heart disease and several forms of cancer. Some phytochemicals may also enhance memory and eyesight. Include many types of fruits and vegetables



## Holidays = Joy, Celebration and Food

Holiday gatherings mean special people, special foods and lots of temptation to indulge. While celebrations often lead to overeating, it is easy to keep things under control if you've got a plan.

- Start your day with a small meal that includes whole grains, fruit, dairy foods and protein like eggs, ham or peanut butter.
- Don't starve yourself before the meal. The longer you go without eating, the more you eat when you sit down for a meal.
- Select foods carefully. Think about what foods you want to eat, which ones you will just sample and which ones you will skip.
- Lastly, enjoy the celebration. Focus on visiting and enjoying the time you have with family and friends. You'll eat less and feel good about what you've eaten.

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# Holidays and Stress



Holidays and stress often go hand in hand. Budgeting for holiday meals, decorations, and gifts in a slow economy is tough. Even the *good* kind of stress that goes along with welcoming relatives into your home or attending holiday parties can have physical symptoms.

There are ways to fight back!

- **Weight gain:**

Stress can raise levels of the hormone cortisol, which can increase appetite. Many people who are dealing with increased stress practice “nervous eating” that leads to weight gain. To avoid gaining holiday weight, keep low-calorie foods (such as fresh fruits and vegetables) around the house—especially during gatherings when higher-calorie foods are usually served. Watch portion sizes when you enjoy holiday treats. Stick to your physical activity schedule as closely as possible.

- **Infections:**

Stress can weaken the immune system, causing us to be more susceptible to infections. The fear of H1N1 and the seasonal flu can also cause stress levels to increase. Frequent handwashing can reduce your family’s chances of becoming ill- or prevent an illness from being spread to other family members. Wash with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. Take hand sanitizer with you for frequent use during shopping trips, parties, and other settings where you could come in close contact with people who are sick.

- **Digestive problems:**

That unexplained, nagging belly ache could be caused by stress hormones. These hormones either slow the emptying of the stomach (causing stomach discomfort) or speed it up (causing diarrhea). Heartburn is another concern for holiday revelers. Make it a point not to skip meals or overeat. Fatty foods are harder to digest, so limit those foods. Stay away from foods that usually give you digestive trouble.

- **Increased numbers:**

Your blood pressure, glucose, and cholesterol values usually go up during stressful times. This increases your risk for stroke & heart disease if left unmanaged. If you have health concerns such as diabetes or high blood pressure, monitor your numbers closely during the holidays and stick to your diet, physical activity, and medication schedule.

**Your best defense against holiday stress is a good offense. Getting plenty of sleep, eating a balanced diet, pausing during the day for deep breathing and/or meditation, and exercising regularly are all good strategies for keeping holiday stress under control.**

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