



# The Holidays

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## Relax! Easy Ways to Reduce Holiday Stress

**The holiday season is supposed to be joyful and merry — and that can be stressful. Here are a few tips to help reduce the stress.**

Joy. Merry. Happy. Bright. Those are words associated with the holidays. Stress. Busy. Overwhelmed. Frazzled. Exhausted. Those words are also sometimes associated with the holidays.

The holidays can bring some extra stress — but there are ways to manage that stress. Here are a few tips to help you relax and enjoy the holidays.

**Create a game plan.** A little time spent organizing can be a big time-saver later. Make a list of what you need to buy and set a realistic deadline for buying the items. Try to shop ahead of time, before things are picked over and you're under pressure. If you'll be cooking, plan your menu. Think whether some items could be prepared ahead and frozen or refrigerated. Having guests? Ask them to bring a dish to cut down on your work.

**Make a budget and stick to it.** Money is one of the major stressors during the holidays. Don't dig yourself into a hole by overspending. A thoughtful gift doesn't have to be expensive. If money is tight, suggest a family gift exchange with an accepted spending limit.

**Accept reality.** Guests may arrive late. Your mother may get on your nerves. The turkey may be dry. Real life isn't a holiday special. Don't expect perfect decorations, a perfect meal or perfect people. Relax, go with the flow and enjoy what you have.



## Video Spotlight:

[Is there a healthy holiday cookie?](#)

[Stress management starts with you](#)

## The Holidays

### Relax! Easy Ways to Reduce Holiday Stress (*continued*)

**Beware of unhealthy stress relievers.** Holiday stress causes some people to fall into bad habits such as smoking, drinking or eating too much. Think about any unhealthy habits you're prone to and think about better ways to handle the stress. For example, if you've quit smoking, talk with another family member who doesn't smoke to give you support if tobacco is around.

**Create new traditions.** Stressed out by the usual festivities? Try something different. Instead of cooking a huge meal on your own, make it a potluck. Ask adults to bring gag gifts or have a "white elephant" or used book gift exchange. Attend a local holiday concert, walk the neighborhood to look at holiday lights or go sledding. Looking to bring the true meaning of the holidays in to perspective? Try volunteering. You can include your children in volunteer activities, too.

**Make time for your health.** In the holiday rush, don't let your well-being fall by the wayside. Try to stay on your normal sleep schedule and get regular exercise. If you can't find a 30-minute chunk of time for exercise, break it up into three 10-minute sessions spread through the day. Be sure to talk with your doctor if you're increasing your activity level.

**Give yourself a break.** In the midst of doing things for others, it's easy to forget to take care of ourselves. If you feel stress building up, get away for a few minutes. Find a quiet corner and do some deep breathing, listen to calming music or just sit. Or throw on a coat and slip outside for a walk.

**Be proactive.** Think about what has been most stressful for you this holiday season. Then make proactive plans for what you will do differently for the next holiday season.

**Enjoy!** The holidays are supposed to be a time of joy and togetherness. In the flurry of the holidays, we sometimes forget what we're celebrating. Remember to savor the time with people you love.

#### SOURCES:

- American Psychological Association. Making the most of the holiday season Accessed: 08/21/2012
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2008 Physical activity guidelines for Americans. Accessed: 08/21/2012
- American Diabetes Association. Tips for fending off holiday stress. Accessed: 08/21/2012
- American Council on Exercise. ACE's top 10 tips for surviving the holidays. Accessed: 08/21/2012



# How to keep your heart healthy (and your waistline trim) at holiday meals

Holiday meals, with turkey or ham and all the fixings, can turn the dining room table into a high-fat smorgasbord. As tasty as they are, these feasts are enough to make your arteries groan.

The typical holiday meal is laden with fat: gravies made with meat drippings, mounds of creamy mashed potatoes, your favorite pies. American adults usually gain one to two pounds each year, including slightly less than one pound during the holidays alone.

How bad is pigging out at holiday meals? Over time, that gradual weight can raise your risk of serious health problems, such as diabetes, arthritis and cardiovascular disease. Studies also show that fats -- especially those found in vegetable shortening, margarine and some oils -- can clog the arteries and contribute to heart disease.

### Transforming high-calorie holiday fare

A traditional holiday dinner of turkey, stuffing, other dishes and desserts can exceed 2,500 calories and 130 grams of fat. That's just for one meal. This is more calories than you should consume in a whole day.

But, there are ways to de-fat holiday meals and keep your arteries and your taste buds happy. Here are some tips:

### De-fat your gravy

Two tablespoons of regular gravy contain about 4 grams of fat and most people pour on more than that. Try pouring meat drippings into a container ahead of time and then refrigerating. The fat rises to the surface so you can peel it off.

### Un-stuff the stuffing

One benefit of this is that the stuffing does not absorb all the fat from the bird. Also, the inside of the bird gets cooked more thoroughly, killing any salmonella that may be present. Also, try adding nuts and fruits instead of sausage or turkey giblets in your stuffing.

### Nix the butter

Try adding a little brown sugar, cinnamon and nutmeg to your sweet potatoes instead of butter. Bake them in a nonstick baking pan.

### Remove the skin

A 3 1/2-ounce serving of roast turkey breast with skin has 197 calories and 8.3 grams of fat. Without skin, it has 157 calories and 3.2 grams of fat.

### Make a single-crust pie instead of a double-crust one

Most of the fat in pies is found in the crust. Roll the crust a little thinner if you use a store-bought crust. Fruit pies are lower in fat than a pecan pie.



### How to keep your heart healthy (and your waistline trim) at holiday meals *(continued)*

#### Bring out the fruits and vegetables

Focus on pumpkin, carrots, sweet potatoes or other orange vitamin-packed vegetables. Greens such as broccoli, spinach and collard greens all pack vitamin power too. Serve colorful raw veggies with low-fat dip as an appetizer.



#### Make smart substitutions

Use fat-free, low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth to moisten dressing. Use olive oil in place of butter or margarine. Mash potatoes with nonfat sour cream and low-fat milk. Use fat-free non-dairy creamers or evaporated skim milk instead of cream when you bake.

#### Don't starve yourself until dinner

Have a healthy breakfast so you don't load up at the big meal. When you sit down to eat, try just a little bit of everything and go easy on second helpings and dessert.

#### The benefits of exercise

Take a walk after dinner, or exercise sometime during the day to offset meal calories. Several studies have shown that moderate exercise after a fatty meal helps prevent fat from affecting your arteries.

Take a 45-minute walk two hours after a high-fat meal, or three 10-minute walks over a three-hour period. But always check with your doctor before you increase your activity level, especially if you have medical problems or have been inactive.

So, enjoy your meal, but prepare it with less fat and walk it off afterwards. Your arteries and your waistline will thank you.

#### SOURCES:

- American Psychological Association. Making the most of the holiday season Accessed: 08/21/2012
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- American Diabetes Association. Tips for fending off holiday stress. Accessed: 08/21/2012
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## Kids and the Holidays: Keeping the Season Bright When Money Is Tight

### If you're low on funds this holiday season, here's how to keep the holidays happy for your kids.

Many families may be feeling the pinch this holiday season. It can be especially hard when you have kids. There are lots of ways other than presents and decorations to celebrate the season.

Many of the things children remember about the holidays are the experiences, and not the material items. So, don't stress — try some different ways to give your children a memorable holiday season.

#### Setting the stage

- **Talk with your kids.** Children of a certain age understand that it takes money to buy things. Explain to them you don't have a lot this year, and that there will be fewer presents. It's important to give them realistic expectations. However, don't go into details about your finances as that can create anxiety, especially with young children.

### Kids and the Holidays: Keeping the Season Bright When Money Is Tight (*continued*)

- **Tell them what's important.** Remind children that the holidays are really not about material things. Get them excited about other things, like fun family traditions, visits with cousins or meals with special foods.
- **Talk to family, friends and co-workers.** Let them know that you're on a strict budget this year. Suggest eliminating the gift exchange, or putting a \$5 limit on it. (Others may be relieved!) Put the money you save toward your kids.
- **Ask your child if they remember any of the gifts they received last year.** The idea is not to make them feel guilty. But their answers may convince you that lasting joy comes from making their favorite cookies with you, or having a snowball fight or taking a ride to see holiday lights.
- **Volunteer with the entire family.** There are numerous opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to give back to the community you live in.

### Gift-giving on a shoestring

Here are some ways to avoid breaking the bank this year:

- **Make a list before you shop.** Be specific, noting each person you want to buy for and what the gift will be.
- **Write down the amount you'll spend, and stick to it.** You may find yourself in a post-holiday funk if you overspend. And you risk feeling a heavy sense of regret when the bills come.
- **Leave the credit cards home.** Try taking out a certain amount of cash from the bank. Limit yourself to that amount. That way, you can't give in to the temptation to buy those things you just happen to see — and “must have” — when you're looking for something else.
- **Try to buy your child's top-choice gift.** Then add a number of very small gifts so that they still have the joy of opening several.
- **Shop at a dollar store.** You can buy many small items that children love, such as coloring books, toys and stickers. You can also find low-cost wrapping paper and ribbon.
- **Make it yourself.** Maybe your teen would like a knitted scarf in her favorite color. Your toddler would probably be thrilled with a simple doll. Look online or get a library book to find other ideas.
- **Create personalized “gift cards” for activities you can do together.** These could be anything your child enjoys — going sledding, having a barbecue on the beach, fishing or staying up late to watch a movie.
- **Work with your children on making their own personalized gift cards** so they can learn a special gift doesn't have to be associated with spending money.
- **Get a jump on next year.** Right after the holidays, retailers offer great discounts on merchandise. Holiday items are on clearance. Stock up for the coming year. Decide on a place you'll store the items.

If you can't afford gifts for your children, call the local Toys for Tots or get in touch with your house of worship.



### Kids and the Holidays: Keeping the Season Bright When Money Is Tight (*continued*)

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There's nothing wrong with asking for help when you need it. Others who are more fortunate enjoy sharing their blessings to brighten a child's holiday.

#### **Take care of yourself**

Finally, recognize that you are best prepared to make the most of your family's celebrations when you feel good. Make sure to set reasonable expectations for yourself and how much you can handle. Say no to unwanted invitations. Tell yourself it's OK if you don't spend as much as last year. Give yourself occasional breaks to take a walk, get a haircut or read. And recognize that the holidays don't have to be "perfect".

#### **SOURCES:**

- American Psychological Association. Dollars and sense: Talking to your children about the economy. Accessed: 10/17/2012
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The 12 ways to health holiday song. Accessed: 10/17/2012
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