

# Happy Healthy Holidays!

During the holiday season, many of us find it challenging to maintain healthy habits. Here's how to get through the season in good form.

**Alcohol: be holiday smart!**

Cutting back on drinking is a common New Year's resolution. Holiday parties are full of socializing, yummy treats, and often a bit more alcohol than many of us are used to. With all the social events and toasting to the New Year, some of us can lose track of how much alcohol we've consumed. Head into this holiday season with heightened alcohol awareness, and beat the January resolution rush.

While at parties, pace your intake of drinks. Wait an hour between drinks, and make sure you have something to eat so that you are not drinking on an empty stomach. Having food in your stomach will help slow the effects of alcohol intoxication. Alternate between alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. And watch out for that bowl of holiday punch, which may pack more punch than you'd expect.

Women tend to be smaller than men and have a slightly slower metabolism. These factors can cause women to reach a higher blood alcohol concentration than men for the same number of drinks. Limit your drinks accordingly! The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto advises that a standard drink consists of one 341 mL (12-ounce) bottle of beer (5% alcohol), one 142 mL (5-ounce) glass of wine (12% alcohol), or one 43 mL (1½-ounce) serving of hard liquor (40% alcohol).

Always use your best judgment and moderate those "glasses of good cheer." Your body will thank you for it... and you might be able to check off one item from your list of resolutions.

**Active living for the holidays**

Let it snow! Let it snow! Let it snow? Whether you're a fan of the white stuff or not, it'll be hard for many of us to avoid the snow this winter. Rather than hibernating until spring, embrace the fun, festive, seasonal spirit and take part in some winter fitness.

You could gather your family and friends and make winter fitness a group thing. Or you could head out into the snow with only yourself and a playful, adventurous attitude. Either way, find a place for fitness in your holiday schedule. Physical activity can help relieve stress and burn off some of those holiday indulgences. It doesn't have to take a lot of time, or even be particularly strenuous. Evidence shows that even low-intensity exercise has health benefits.

Keep in mind that while physical activity offers a range of health rewards, everyone should proceed at their own pace. If you have been habitually physically inactive, start slowly and gradually add on daily to the amount of exercise you do. If you have health concerns, speak to your health professional about the level or type of activity that is right for you. For extra information on physical fitness, read "Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Living" at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca.

Try the following activities. Winter has much to offer – get out there and enjoy the season!

**Strap on those skates.** Whether you're skating on a rink, a lake, or canal, make the most of the outdoor skating season. It's part of the Canadian winter landscape! If you do skate on lakes, canals, or other natural bodies of water, remember that ice can be unpredictable and that you should always check with local authorities in advance about the safety of the ice you'd like to skate on.

**Hit the slopes.** Snowboarding, downhill skiing, tobogganing... slopes of varying grades provide hours of fun. Ski hills offer ski and snowboard lessons for everyone from beginner level onwards, so the whole family can get involved. And an afternoon of tobogganing can get the heart pumping and the laughter roaring. What better way to top off the holidays?

**Ski cross-country.** Whether you live in an urban or rural setting, Canada has a wealth of nearby parks and trails just waiting to be explored. Before you venture out, familiarize yourself with appropriate safety precautions. Contact your local cross-country ski organization for more details.

**Walk in a winter wonderland.** Or, better yet, put on the snowshoes. "Snowshoeing in a winter wonderland" doesn't have the same ring, but it may be just the way to slow down the holiday pace and appreciate the beauty that the season has to offer – and get some good exercise too!

#### Savour the flavours of the season – without overdoing it!

The rush of the winter holidays can make it challenging to stick to good nutritional habits. Many things can divert us from our best intentions. All sorts of social events, tempting treats, last-minute shopping excursions, travelling out of town... these holiday extras may interfere with our regular eating habits and derail a healthy diet. This season, try out these tips for healthful and happy holiday feasting.

**Hit the grocery stores.** Stock your shelves with healthy, can't-miss foods. During this hectic season, it's common to feel run down, so it is especially important to maintain a healthy nutrient intake. Keep fresh fruit and vegetables on hand, and stash away some hearty, beneficial snacks, such as nuts, trail mixes, or dried fruits.

**Don't skip meals.** Especially not breakfast! A healthy and power-packed breakfast could include fruits, whole grains, and some protein. A warm bowl of oatmeal with berries and almonds will get you far even on the most frantic of days. Missing out on regular meals will only make you hungrier later on and more likely to indulge in unhealthy foods – the hors d'oeuvres at an after-work party, or the quick fix of pizza or fries on the way.

**Brown bag it.** Ensure you fuel up with a nourishing lunch each day by bringing it from home. Steal a few minutes the night before to pack a good lunch. A complete and nutritious meal could be something as simple as a vegetable and bean soup, a whole-grain roll, and a cup of yogurt. It's simple, but it meets your daily requirements of all four food groups. By organizing this in advance, you'll avoid a last-minute morning scramble that might substitute handy snacks for healthy food.

**Pace yourself.** Holiday treats are often delicious – but not nutritious. At social events, try to pace yourself when faced with tempting goodies. Seek out healthier food choices, such as the fresh fruit or veggie tray. Allow yourself to partake of a couple of the "naughtier" holiday delicacies, but do so in moderation. Opt for a small portion, take your time, and really savour each bit of the richer, sweeter treats. The slower you eat, the fuller and more satisfied you will feel.

#### Stay stress-free this holiday season

Stress piles up around the holidays. What should be a time of peace, joy, and giving can become a time of hurrying, rushing, and worrying. It's important to find a way to balance holiday stress so you can enjoy the true pleasures of the season.

**Know your "enemy."** Identify what causes you stress and find ways around it. For example, some people find stores too crowded in December. If you need to shop, try shopping online from the comfort of your home, or order by phone or mail. Take a half-day off work to shop when stores are less busy. Give home-made gifts or ones that don't need to be bought or wrapped (such as a promise to take someone to the theatre, or a night of babysitting).

**Get enough sleep.** Give yourself the gift of a good night's rest. Get your shopping, wrapping, and planning done in time for a full seven to eight hours of sleep each night, and more during periods of extra stress.

**Eat your veggies.** During stressful times, your immune system could use an extra boost of nutrition. Keep fresh or canned veggies on hand to supplement your meals or fill in the gaps as snacks. For further information, see " Savour the flavours of the season – without overdoing it! "

**Avoid using caffeine, alcohol, or tobacco as a prop to help you keep going.** If you find you can't keep up with your schedule, it may mean you need to re-evaluate and reduce some of your commitments.

**Don't overbook.** It is all right to say "no" now and again! You have the option of politely declining invitations or rescheduling a few events if need be. Save your strength and holiday spirit for the activities that really matter to you.

**Give yourself a break.** Many of us get so caught up in giving and sharing with others that we forget to take care of ourselves. Slot in some relaxation time – you deserve it! This is one appointment you really shouldn't decline.

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