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# Easy ways to lower your cholesterol

High cholesterol is an issue for many men and women, who may or may not know that excessive cholesterol in the blood can increase a person's risk of cardiovascular disease. That's a genuine concern for many people, as the American Heart Association notes that cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the United States.

The link between high cholesterol and cardiovascular disease has long since been established, but the good news is that even men and women with considerably high cholesterol levels can greatly reduce their risk of one day developing cardiovascular disease. Some may need the help of prescription medication to lower their cholesterol, while others might only need to make certain lifestyle changes to lower their cholesterol.

Men and women should discuss a plan of attack to lower their cholesterol levels with a physician,

who will determine if medication should be a part of the plan. Even if medication is a factor, the following are some lifestyle changes men and women with high or moderate cholesterol levels can make to reduce their risk of cardiovascular disease.

Shed those extra pounds. According to the Mayo Clinic, losing as little as 5 to 10 percent of your body weight can greatly reduce cholesterol levels. There are a number of ways to lose weight, but the most successful way to lose weight and keep it off typically involves adopting a more active lifestyle and coupling that with a healthy diet. The AHA recommends 30 minutes of physical activity each day. This can include any number of activities that get you off the couch and exercising, including walking, biking, swimming, and jogging.

An additional benefit of exercising to lose weight is that it can raise your so-called "good" cholesterol

(also known as high-density lipoprotein, or HDL), which can protect you against a heart attack. Many medical experts believe HDL carries cholesterol away from the arteries and back to the liver, where the cholesterol is then passed from the body.

Embrace heart-healthy foods. One of the more effective, yet often most difficult, ways to lower cholesterol is to make dietary changes, forgoing unhealthy fare for more heart-friendly foods. The idea of changing one's diet does not appeal to many people, but a more heart-healthy diet does not have to be devoid of taste. You can still eat red meat and dairy products, but keep them to a minimum, as both red meat and dairy can raise your "bad" cholesterol. Also known as low-density lipoprotein, or LDL, bad cholesterol can combine with other substances to form plaque, a thick, hard deposit that can narrow the arteries and make them less

flexible, increasing one's risk of heart attack and stroke. Red meat and dairy tend to have a good deal of saturated fat, which the Mayo Clinic suggests should account for less than 7 percent of your daily caloric intake.

There are many ways to make more heart-healthy dietary choices, some of which include selecting whole grains (including whole wheat pasta and whole wheat flour), loading up on fruits and vegetables that are high in fiber (which can lower cholesterol) and choosing entrees for foods that are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as certain types of fish, which help lower LDL cholesterol.

Stop smoking. Smokers have a surefire way to reduce their cholesterol, though some may find it more difficult than making any dietary changes. Quitting smoking has an almost immediate impact on the

health of your heart, which is at a lower risk of attack within 24 hours of quitting smoking. Within one year of quitting, your risk of heart attack is half that of someone who continues to smoke, and in 15 years your risk of heart disease will be similar to that of someone who has never smoked. In addition, quitting smoking may improve your HDL cholesterol level. Though it might not be easy, quitting smoking might be the most effective way to improve your cholesterol levels while lowering your risk for cardiovascular disease.

More information about lowering your cholesterol is available at [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org).

## Popular New Year Resolutions

Every year, right before the clock strikes 12 on December 31, people far and wide make resolutions for the new year. There are some common themes from year to year, with certain resolutions topping the lists.

**Lose weight:** Whether they're inspired by goals of healthy living, the reality of stepping on a scale after holiday dining or simply because clothes have been a little snug, people often resolve to lose weight in the year ahead.

**Quit smoking:** Individuals are feeling increased pressure to give up the habit due to smoking bans in many buildings and public spaces. Plus, it's one of the worst things a person can do for his or her health.

**Get fit:** In conjunction with losing weight, the overall quest for physical fitness drives up gym membership numbers every January.

**Tame finances:** The first credit card bill after the holiday season may be a wakeup call for those who have had difficulty balancing a budget. This is often a time when people make plans to get finances under control at the start of the new year.

**Enjoy life more:** Many people are taking personal happiness into their own hands. Perhaps thanks to a troublesome economy and other sources of sour news, it has become common in recent years for resolutions to be made concerning reducing stress and having more fun. This may involve everything from spending more time with family to taking time for leisure activities to simply enjoying more of the hobbies one finds fun.



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# Ideas abound for budget-friendly holiday meals

With so many people looking for alternatives to costly holiday fare, newspapers, magazines and online cooking sites are overflowing with great ideas. But the key to hosting a successful seasonal meal is not simply finding interesting recipes and purchasing lower-cost foods, but in creating and organizing a menu that works from start to finish. The easiest way to do that? Make a plan and stick to it.

Share the cooking and the cost. Rising food costs and tighter budgets have prompted many people to host potluck holiday dinners. As the host, you might prepare the main dish and have your guests fill in the rest of the menu. Either ask participants to contribute their signature salad, side dish or dessert, or plan a meal along a particular theme and give guests choices from among a list of menu items.

Simplify. There is no rule stating that holiday dinners have to be fancy, so don't be afraid to plan a menu that has fewer and less costly components. For example, serve a hearty and flavorful turkey stew or soup in place of a more expensive roasted turkey. Pair it with a simple salad and loaves of crusty bread, then finish up with homemade apple cobbler or a plate of cookies. Your guests will leave happy and well nourished, and you will have served up a flavorful and frugal holiday feast.

Cook and freeze. Another option is to build your menu around a few dishes that can be prepared ahead and frozen. Cooking ahead saves money by spreading out food expenditures and avoiding last-minute shopping, which often leads to spending more money.

Go meatless. Vegetarian dishes can be far less expensive, especially when feeding a crowd. Consider replacing the turkey or roast with a pasta or risotto dish, roasted vegetable tart or veggie lasagna. Great sources of vegetarian recipes include vegkitchen.com, epicurious.com, vegetarianimes.com, and allrecipes.com.

Stick to homemade. As a rule, anything you make at home will cost less -- and likely taste better -- than prepared foods from the grocery store or a restaurant. If you stick with simple recipes that don't require an array of exotic ingredients, your homemade holiday meal will hit the spot and you won't hit the ceiling when you add up the food bill.

# Prevent slips and falls

Winter is right around the corner. That means that most people will be trading in windbreakers and rakes for heavy coats and snow shovels. Winter can be a beautiful time of the year, but the snow and ice that covers the landscape in a pristine sheet of white can present certain hazards as well.

Walking on ice can be extremely dangerous, particularly to those people who already may have mobility issues, such as the elderly. According to the National Safety Council, slips and falls are the single largest cause of emergency room visits. Slip and fall injuries also are the third largest cause of workplace injuries, says the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Many accidental falls occur from lack of stability or poor physical health. However, come winter, many falls can be attributed to walking on slippery surfaces covered with snow or ice. To avoid falls on ice, men and women might want to take certain precautions.

Change the way you walk. Adapting to the slippery conditions could help prevent some of the falls caused by snow and ice. When walking on ice, plant feet with toes

facing outward slightly, and then shuffle along. Hunching over a little and extending arms outward will help to lower your center of gravity and also offer a little more stability. Take short, flat steps so that the heels and toes of your shoes stay in contact with the ground as much as possible and offer maximum surface contact.

You should not take large strides or move quickly. This can definitely lead to slips and falls. Rather, leave extra time to get to and fro, especially when walking to mass transit or to and from your car when commuting.

Switch shoes - flat shoes with rubber soles are more capable of gripping the ice than other types of shoes. Contrary to popular belief, clunky winter boots may make walking more difficult. Try rain boots instead, as rain boots typically have flatter soles. There also are many different types of shoe ice grips on the market that can be added to the soles of shoes. They easily slip on to offer more traction. Whenever possible, try to avoid shoes with already slippery soles or high heels. Carry these shoes with you and change after you are

inside.

Treat walkways. Keeping on top of falling snow can help alleviate slippery walkways. Use a combination of snowmelt and sand so that you can keep sidewalks clear.

Remove shoes indoors. Slips and falls can happen inside a home as well. Many people have tile or laminate entryways in their homes, and these entrances can become quite slippery when snow-packed shoes warm up and the snow melts, creating a wet, slick surface. Avoid falls by placing mats by the front door and removing shoes when you enter. Stash a pair of slippers nearby into which you can change.

Pack light. Carrying heavy bags can disrupt your center of gravity and contribute to falls. Whenever possible, travel light or use a backpack to evenly distribute weight to help you walk more easily.

Falls on slippery surfaces can be quite dangerous. Avoid trips to the emergency room for broken bones or abrasions by slowing down, dressing appropriately and walking on paths that have been cleared of snow and ice.



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# Great gifts for men and women hoping to get healthier

The holidays are synonymous with many things, including get-togethers with family and friends, shopping and, at the tail end of the season, resolutions. One of the more common New Year's resolutions is a commitment to getting healthier. This year, holiday shoppers can combine the tradition of gift-giving with the tradition of making New Year's resolutions by giving a loved one who wants to improve personal health a gift that can make keeping that resolution that much easier.

When holiday shopping this season, consider the following gift ideas for that health-conscious friend or family member who's looking to turn over a new leaf in the new year by adopting a healthier lifestyle.

Fitness centers tend to see a spike in enrollment at the dawn of a new year, as men and women who want to get healthier take the first step by signing up for a gym membership. The holiday season can be a great time to sign up for a membership, as many fitness centers

waive their initiation fees in an effort to attract more customers. When trying to help a friend or family member get back on a healthy track, offer to pay a portion of their membership fees or, if their preferred club is charging an initiation fee, offer to pay that instead. Recipients might feel more obligated to go to the gym if they know a loved one helped pay for it.

Many people cite a lack of time as the primary reason they don't exercise enough. Getting to and from the gym takes time, but having a cardiovascular machine, whether it's an elliptical machine, an exercise bike or a treadmill, at home removes this hurdle, increasing the chances that people will exercise more often. And the potential benefits of routine cardiovascular exercise are considerable. According to the American Heart Association, as little as 30 minutes of daily cardiovascular exercise each day can significantly reduce an individual's risk for heart disease.

Few activities are more enjoyable and simultaneously

beneficial as riding a bicycle. Many people still enjoy riding a bike just like they did when they were children, when they might not have known just how healthy riding a bicycle was. Cycling improves cardiovascular fitness, lowering a person's risk for heart disease while helping to build and tone muscles. In addition, men and women with preexisting joint conditions often find riding a bicycle is a great low-impact exercise that encourages them to get off the couch in a way that doesn't aggravate their conditions.

Many adults received a bicycle as a holiday gift when they were children, and those looking to adopt a healthier lifestyle might be just as excited to receive a bicycle once again.

Adopting a healthier life style

does not have to be all about exercise. In fact, eating healthier is just as important as exercising more. A common misconception about eating healthy is that healthy foods don't boast the flavor of those irresistible, yet ultimately unhealthy, foods we can't get enough of. However, a healthy diet can be flavorful, so help health-conscious men and women get started with a cookbook filled with healthy and delicious recipes.

Before buying a cookbook, find out if the book's eventual recipient has any specific dietary restrictions, including if he or she needs to eat gluten-free or has been told to avoid red meat. Then find a cookbook that suits them but does so in a way that allows them to embrace healthy eating.

## Diet drinks for the holidays

Although food and presents may be on the minds of holiday hosts and hostesses, they may want to give some consideration to beverages as well. To be accommodating to the most number of guests, include sugar-free beverages when celebrating the season. According to a study by Tala Fakhouri, an epidemiologist with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, diet drinks are overtaking sugary beverages among many health-conscious men and women. Research found diet drink consumption has

*continue on next page*



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# It's the Holidays

increased over the past decade, reinforcing the belief that regular soda drinking has decreased. Diet drinks include calorie-free and low-calorie sodas, fruit drinks, energy drinks, carbonated waters, and sports beverages.

Sugary beverages have been under fire for years, particularly because of their suspected link to rising obesity levels. At roughly 150 calories per serving, one sugary soft drink per day can add roughly 1,000 calories to the average person's diet per week.

When hosting guests for the holidays it is important to make available a wide variety of beverages. Water is always the healthiest beverage, so make that available to all guests. Put filtered water in a pitcher with some cucumber or apple slices for a refreshing flavor. For those serving soft drinks, have diet varieties on hand for people who are counting calories. All-natural fruit juices may be a wise choice for parties with children.

## Make your list and check it twice for safety

One thing that should be on your holiday shopping list this year is a reminder to watch for and avoid imitation products. Fake electronics and toys can be untested, uncertified, and unsafe.

CSA Group, a leader in anti-counterfeiting efforts, offers gift-givers an easy checklist for safe shopping:

**Check the packaging:** Counterfeit packaging often has poor design, misspellings and unclear printing. Ensure there is contact information for the manufacturer in the event that there is an issue with the products.

**Check the name:** A product with no brand identifier or trademark may be a counterfeit. Reputable companies want you to know whose product you're buying. Buy from reputable retailers with clear exchange or return policies.

**Check the "look and feel":** Fake products are often too light and flimsy.

**Check for the mark:** Avoid electrical products missing a label from a recognized certification organization such as CSA Group.

If a bargain seems too good to be true, it probably is. **More safety tips are available online at [www.csa-holiday.com](http://www.csa-holiday.com).**

## Holiday Traditions, Old and New

Many Christmas traditions are older than some might think. The tradition of lighting up a Christmas tree, for example, dates back to the days before Christmas lights. Before electric-powered twinkle lights were invented and even before electricity was discovered, people used actual candles to adorn the Christmas tree. As one can imagine, having an open flame next to a dried-out tree was risky, so it was customary to keep a bucket of water next to the tree in the case of fire. As if fire wasn't enough, the tinsel used to decorate trees was made from strips of silver and even lead -- something that is now known to be a health hazard to adults and children alike.

Although we've come a long way since candles and lead, even now trees that are overly dry and decorated with lights that have frayed wires can just as easily lead to fires. Plus, plastic tinsel can be a choking hazard for children and pets. One Christmas staple that has lost its status as a safety hazard is the poinsettia plant. It has long been thought that poinsettias are poisonous to people and animals. While there is some toxicity to the plant, it would require the ingestion of hundreds of leaves to get a toxic dose of a plant's poison.

**Online Shopping** has expanded considerably in the last several years. Although Black Friday and its online counterpart, Cyber Monday, may seem like the best times to gain the lowest prices on merchandise, it actually could pay to wait a little longer. Merchants may offer deep discounts on premium items that haven't moved during the last days of the holiday shopping season, typically between December 21 and 24. This includes big-ticket products, such as fine jewelry, furniture and televisions. It is possible to take advantage of deep price cuts the closer you get to Christmas Day. Keep in mind that you may have to pay a premium for getting those gifts delivered on time, which could offset the savings. Therefore, it might be a wise idea to present gift recipients with a photo of what they will be getting for the holidays and deliver the item a day or two later.

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# Secrets to staying lean during the Holidays and beyond

Eggnog, turkey and stuffing, assorted pastries -- the holidays are as much about the food and drink as they are about sharing good times together. So is it any wonder that many gain weight during the holiday season?

Researchers at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases have found the average person gains a pound a year from holiday eating, which accumulates and can lead to health problems later in life. But there are some lucky few who seem impervious to the goodies, staying thin despite the extra holiday food. How do some seem to stay so thin all of the time?

According to Men's Health expert and editor-in-chief David Zinczenko, who has spent more than 20 years interviewing all sorts of leading weight loss experts and reviewing various studies, "What separates the fit from the fat is a series of rules." These rules are easy to follow and they don't require any special exercise equipment, crash dieting or subsisting solely on wood chips to keep fit. Here are some things to consider during the holidays and as you make healthy eating resolutions for the new year.

Stop dieting. Some studies indicate that individuals who are currently on a diet are more likely to gain weight in subsequent months or years. That's because restriction of fat and caloric intake can affect muscle growth and bone density. Muscle burns calories very well, so you want to hold onto strong muscles. Also, carefully monitoring what you eat can lead to stress hormones flowing through the body.

Hormones like cortisol have been linked to weight gain. So ease up on watching every bite of food you eat and you just may be happier -- and thinner -- for it.

Choose high-protein foods. Protein fills the stomach and takes a longer time to digest in the body, which in turn helps you to burn calories. Selecting lean proteins, like turkey, chicken, lean beef, and pork, can help you to feel fuller longer and reduces the chance you'll nibble on fluff snacks during the day. When faced with holiday fare, choose protein sources to fill you up before indulging on other items.

Fill up on fiber, too. Studies indicate that getting 25 grams of fiber, which is easily achieved by having three servings of fruits and vegetables, can boost fat-fighting efforts of the body by at least 30 percent. Many processed foods are increasing fiber content, but be sure to read labels. That fiber may also be accompanied by a lot of sugar and extra carbohydrates. Fresh fruit and vegetables and whole grain

breads are easy ways to get a fiber boost.

Engage in fun exercise. Many people equate staying thin to spending hours at the gym every day. But all it takes is about 20 to 30 minutes of any type of daily activity, whether that be chasing around the kids or playing fetch with a dog. The concept of losing weight just by doing enjoyable activities is known as non-exercise activity thermogenesis, or NEAT. So go for a bike ride and burn 200 calories in the process.

Skip fat-free foods. It would seem foods that have no or low fat would be better for you, but fat is actually a necessity for the body - helping you to feel satisfied. Eating a fat-free item could have you feeling hungry soon after and ready to snack later on. In addition, some fat-free items have extra sugar or preservatives for flavor, which can undermine weight-loss plans.

Don't be a couch potato. Get up from that computer chair and cut down on television watching.

A sedentary lifestyle can easily pack on the pounds. A study by researchers at the University of Vermont found overweight participants who cut their daily TV time in half (from an average of 5 hours to 2.5 hours) burned an extra 119 calories a day. Remember when you were a kid playing with your friends outside from sunrise to sunset? You probably weren't overweight then. But adults now spend more time indoors, and all that time spent in front of the tube could be hindering your weight-loss efforts.

If you follow a few easy rules, there finally may be happier and healthier way to stay thin without dieting, even during and after the holiday season.

## 5 ways to cheer yourself up

- 1. Get organized.** Tackling small goals, even just tidying up the kitchen or making the bed.
- 2. Eat spicy food.** Researchers at the State University of New York at Buffalo say that the capsaicin in hot peppers triggers your brain to release endorphins.
- 3. Get more sleep.** Getting seven to eight hours of sleep is essential to mental health. Just being shy a few hours of rest can put you in a foul mood.
- 4. Be nice to others.** Smiling at someone and getting a response can improve mood.
- 5. Exercise.** Get the heart pumping and you'll feel re-energized.



## Bon Voyage!

Australia, one of the driest continents on earth, is located in the Southern Hemisphere and surrounded by the Indian and Pacific Oceans. It is a wealthy country with a market economy and low rate of poverty. Seasons are opposite ours with summer being December to February, while June to August is winter. Their

national currency is the Australian dollar.

When visiting, crossing the International Date Line changes the date by one day. If traveling from the east coast you arrive 2 days later. Traveling back you arrive home the same day.

Australians are responsible for everyday inventions such as the note pads, aspirin, the pacemaker, penicillin, the clothesline, artificially manufactured ice and the boomerang.

Some of their best known animals are the kangaroo, koala, dingo, platypus, wallaby & the wombat.

Train travel is a convenient, affordable & scenic way to explore Australia. If renting a car they drive on the left hand side of the road with the steering wheel on the right.

Popular destinations include the coastal city of Sydney, the sun-kissed Harbour City, which is a glamorous collusion of beaches, boutiques and bars. Melbourne is all arts, alleyways and Australian Rules football. The Great Barrier Reef, world's largest coral reef, lies a short distance off the NE coast and extends over 1200 miles. Ulum & the Australian Outback are other popular locations as is Tasmanian Wilderness.

Australians have a unique language, coined "strine", from the way they pronounce Australia, like Aw-Strine. Often words are abbreviated and then add an "o" or "ie" on the end.

So if visiting Down Under is on your bucket list, give us a call, we can get you there. Have a G'day mate!

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## Revamped healthy eating guide

For many years the classic food pyramid has been the method by which many people plan their healthy eating goals. Recently the U.S. Department of Agriculture modified the food pyramid, transforming it into a different symbol altogether -- a dinner plate. The general basis of the "MyPlate" model generated by the USDA is to give individuals a better understanding of the ratios of food that should fill their plates. While the average guidelines for the total amount of each food group that should be eaten varies according to age and sex, the overall messages of how much to fill a plate serve as a good indicator for healthier eating.

Taking a small dinner plate, half of the plate should be filled with fruits and vegetables, which a greater emphasis on vegetables. Slightly less than one-fourth of the other side of the plate should consist of lean protein. The remaining open portion of the plate should be made up of grains -- with at least half of those grains whole grains. A cup of low- or nonfat milk should be an accompaniment to the meal for dairy consumption.

Most people get their recommended amount of oils through many of the foods that they eat, including fish and nuts. The USDA advises anywhere from 3 to 7 teaspoons of total oil consumption daily, depending on age and sex. Otherwise, caloric need is surpassed and weight gain may occur.

In addition to the recommendations on food groups and portion sizes, the MyPlate program has a series of customizable online information on everything from learning about calorie intake to personalized eating plans to physical activity trackers, all free of charge at ChooseMyPlate.gov.

## 5 ways to squash stress

Just about everyone at some point in time has experienced stress. Some suffer from stress powerful enough to have profound effects on daily life and personal health. A variety of strategies, from medication to meditation, can be effective at relieving stress. Stress is not something easily defined. That's because what is stressful to one person may roll off of another's back. Various situations can trigger emotional responses in people. Very often these responses can escalate into stress that affects blood pressure, anxiety levels, mood, sleep patterns, and eating habits.

The American Institute of Stress lists 50 different common signs and symptoms of stress. A few of those symptoms include: frequent headaches, grinding teeth, neck ache, back pain, heartburn, obsessive behavior, over-reaction to small annoyances, increased anger or frustration, rapid or mumbled speech, social withdrawal, excessive gambling or impulse buying, chest pain and palpitations and excessive anxiety or worry.

Stress can have distinct effects on health. There are a number of physical disorders and emotional effects that have been linked to stress. Heart attacks, hypertension, immune system disorders, anxiety, and depression have all been linked to excessive stress.

Reducing stress has become a priority for many people looking to avoid health problems. There are many strategies people can take. Here's a look at five of them. Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR): A person starts from the face and works down the body by tensing all of the muscles in specific areas while inhaling and holding breath.

*Continued on page 11.*

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## Host a Safe, Sound Holiday Party

Few times of the year are simultaneously as festive and dangerous as the winter holiday season. With the celebratory nature of the holiday season often comes the increased risk for accidents, where impaired drivers often take to the streets after over-indulging at holiday parties.

For holiday hosts, the safety concerns are two-fold. In addition to protecting guests, hosts must also be sure to protect themselves. The nation's host laws vary depending on individual states, but hosts can be held liable, both in criminal and civil court, if their impaired guests are allowed to drive home. While everyone has the right to celebrate come the holiday season, it's important for holiday hosts to be extra cautious and always keep their guests' safety and security in mind. When planning a holiday party, hosts should consider the following tips to ensure everyone has a fun time, and a safe and sound one as well.

Only invite close friends and family. Though the spirit of the season makes it tempting for hosts to invite as many people as possible, it's best to only invite those closest to you. Hosts should know how each invitee acts and drinks in a social environment and limit the guest list to those friends and family members who have proven they can handle a drink or two without going overboard.

Invite guests who know one another. Guests who know each other well are less likely to rely on alcohol to break the ice. Alcohol lowers people's inhibitions, making them more comfortable in social situations, particularly when they might not know everyone at a given event. But close-knit groups don't need such devices to loosen their inhibitions, and are more likely to drink responsibly as a result.

Greet guests and take their car keys at the door. It's always polite for hosts to greet guests at the door. But it's even more necessary to do so at holiday parties. When greeting, hosts can gauge whether their guests have gotten a head start on the festivities and can also politely ask guests to hand over their car keys. Everyone's goal is to have a fun and safe time, so guests should be willing to part with their keys at the start of the party as opposed to after the party begins.

Stay sober. Hosts are responsible for their guests and their guests' safety. Regardless of local host laws, staying sober is the only way hosts can accurately determine if a guest is capable of driving or needs a ride home. What's more, hosts must stay sober in the event a guest does need a ride home.

Make the party an active event. Hosts should plan certain activities or games to entertain their guests. With nothing on the docket, guests are more likely to spend idle time drinking.

Have transportation readily available at the end of the night. For smaller gatherings, hosts might be able to handle the designated driver duties all by themselves. However, for larger gatherings, have taxi company phone numbers readily available, and make it known to guests before the party begins, whether on the invitation or when guests arrive, that no one is driving home if the hosts don't feel it's safe.

## Holiday Boutique

Evans Falls Elementary

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## How to reduce stress on pets when hosting guests

The holiday season is a time of joy and togetherness. It's also a time of busy schedules that can impact everyone in the household -- including pets.

People are not the only ones who feel the emotional tug of the holidays. While their owners may be concerned about hosting parties or ensuring all entertaining details are met, pets may be unaccustomed to changes in daily routines that take place when their owners are entertaining guests. New smells and sights and the confusion of the actual event may elevate stress levels for pets. According to ASPCA Director of Anti-Cruelty Behavior Research Dr. Katherine Miller, people may underestimate just how stressed pets feel when their routines are turned upside down.

Take special consideration of pets when any holiday or special occasion takes place. Here are some pointers that can make the process easier on everyone involved.

Try to stick to the routine as much as possible. Although having a party or shopping for gifts may require demands on your time, try to schedule tasks and errands at times when it won't interfere with pets' schedules. For example, try not to alter meal times or daily walks.

Also, if errands have you running late, see if a friend or family member can stop by your home and tend to the pets.

Keep pets' identifications current. Times when people are coming and going from one another's homes may open up possibilities for pets to get loose and lost. Be sure physical identification tags and contact data online for microchips are current so pets who get lost or run away can be easily found and returned home.

Keep pets away from table scraps. Rich foods and desserts are often part of celebrations. While these treats may be enjoyed by guests, they can wreak digestive havoc on many pets. Also, some foods may be choking hazards. Be mindful of taking out the trash promptly and don't let pets indulge in too many table scraps.

Spend time with your pet. Pets may feel left out if you are too busy to spend time with them as you prep for parties and holidays. Make some time to sit with your pet and interact, even if you're just playing around.

Leave a quiet space available for your pet. Some animals are very sociable and enjoy spending time with new people. Others may be skittish around guests and prefer a

low-key area where they can reside during festivities. A quiet bedroom or a crate may be the perfect den for your pet. You also will have peace of mind that the animal is safe and out of harm's way.

If travel is involved in plans, gradually prepare your pet. Visiting for the holidays, birthdays and other special times often involves some sort of travel. You may need to condition a pet to spending periods of time in a crate or carrier so that the ride is event-free. Know pet travel regulations. Some states have laws regarding the transporting of pets over state lines. Know the type of documentation you will need and file the necessary paperwork to ensure you do not face legal issues when traveling with your pet.

Schedule a vet visit. You want to be sure that your pet is in good physical health prior to any gatherings in the household. Having a sick pet when you're planning a party or prepping for the holidays adds extra work to the entire equation.

Holidays, parties, travel, and special events can create changes in schedules and disrupt the comfort level of pets. Know how to make these times as stress-free as possible for companion animals.

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**Squash Stress continued.**

Then he or she relaxes the muscles while exhaling.

Guided imagery: With the help of a recording or one's own imagination, a person pictures a relaxing scene with a possible guide answering profound questions.

Laughing reduces the level of stress hormones, like epinephrine, dopamine, cortisol and others. It also increases endorphins. Laughter is a good distraction and also a mild workout. It contracts the ab muscles and works out the shoulders.

Music can be used in many ways to reduce stress. Soft, peaceful music may help induce meditation and imagery. Upbeat music can get a person dancing, where the physical activity loosens muscles and relieves stress.

Sex can boost mood, reduce blood pressure, promote relaxation through touch and provide a physical workout. All of these factors are good for reducing stress.

## Stress-Free Holiday Entertaining -- Ways to Keep Calm and Carry On

Whether you're a seasoned cook and veteran at throwing parties, or new to the art of entertaining, hosting family and friends can provoke a condition that has been coined, "kitchen performance anxiety." With the holidays upon us, Meyer Corporation, U.S., the largest cookware company in America with long standing brands, such as Farberware and Anolon, enlisted the advice of Los Angeles-based party expert Diane Rossen Worthington for tips on how to alleviate stress and gain confidence hosting parties this time of year, and all four seasons.

Diane is a professionally trained chef, writer, editor, food consultant, and James Beard Award-winning radio show host who has authored more than 20 cookbooks, including her latest, *Seriously Simple Parties -- Recipes, Menus & Advice for Effortless Entertaining* (Chronicle Books). Culling from her newest

book, and vast experience hosting parties large and small, Diane shares a dozen practical ways to keep calm so you can fully enjoy being with your guests.

Start planning your menu as far in advance as possible of your gathering -- whether it's an intimate Sunday brunch, a big cocktail party, a Sunday afternoon open house of cookies and coffee, or a traditional sit-down dinner. Tweak your menu as you get closer to the day to make sure you're comfortable with what you've set out to make. You may need to edit here and there based on how busy your schedule gets during the days leading up to the date.

When selecting recipes, think like a chef and choose dishes with ingredients that focus on what's in season and available at peak freshness. This approach to devising your menu will ensure the best tasting results, even if you're a novice cook. Fortunately, the holidays is all about celebrating what's in season -- such as pumpkin and acorn squash, delicious root vegetables like sweet potatoes and carrots, and crisp apples, juicy pears, pecans, walnuts, cranberries, and more.

Seriously turn down the dial on stress by choosing appetizers, sides

main dishes and desserts that you can make either completely or partly one or several days in advance. This is a huge time saver that relieves a good deal of the pressure to perform on the day of your party. Selecting appetizers that you can make in advance is especially smart, as this gives you the freedom to enjoy the company of guests when they first arrive.

Before you start cooking and baking, take inventory of kitchen equipment to be sure you have everything that's called for in your recipes. Are your pots and pans, cookie sheets, electric mixer, food processor, kitchen knives and other culinary tools in good working order? If you need to replace or add items, now's the time to shop.

A well-stocked pantry is every clever cook's secret weapon. Infuse your recipes with gourmet flavors by having on hand a variety of well-made red wine and balsamic vinegars, assorted oils, good quality chicken and vegetable stock, seasoning salts, capers, spices and nuts. You might want to invest in a package of *Seriously Simple Seasoning Salt* (available at [dianeworthington.com](http://dianeworthington.com)) for spicing up all of your savory dishes.

To save time on preparing drinks when guests arrive, consider making pitchers of a signature cocktail in advance, along with a non-alcoholic version. You can set up a tray in the foyer, kitchen or elsewhere that's convenient for guests to help themselves. For an easy-to-make crowd pleaser that's perfect for the holidays, try mulling fresh apple cider with allspice, cinnamon sticks, lemon slices, and a splash of bourbon or rum.

Make lists of everything that needs to be done, from shopping for ingredients to planning when the cooking or baking gets done to deciding on the look of your table setting and choosing your lighting and background music. You'll make entertaining seriously simple when you refer to your "road map" of lists -- a strategy that truly takes the stress out of pulling it all together.

Give yourself permission to round out your menu with store-bought foods. There's no shame in focusing on what you make best and leaving some items to other experts, like the fabulous bakery down the road with the most divine apple pie and cookies.

When you have a large gathering for a holiday cocktail or dinner party, select dishes that taste great served cold or at room temperature. This takes the pressure off making sure your timing for serving foods piping hot -- not to mention stovetop or oven capacity.

Embrace offers from family members and guests to help out, since let's face it, everyone winds up in the kitchen anyway. Think ahead about the kinds of tasks that can easily be delegated so that guests can feel useful without working too hard - such as tossing salad and serving into salad bowls, pouring water into glasses at the table, ladling food into serving platters, slicing bread, setting the table, and clearing the table. Being open to guests lending a hand puts everyone at ease.

Adapt the habit of chefs who are taught to "clean as you go." It's hard to achieve Zen-like calm in the midst of chaos in the kitchen. While you're preparing dishes, be mindful of wiping down counters, washing utensils and bowls as quickly as possible, and certainly make enough food for leftovers to enjoy the next day.

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