Sharing the holiday season with grandchildren

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If you have grandchildren living nearby, you probably enjoy doing many activities with them during the year. However, the holidays offer special opportunities to get together, do projects and create memories. Let the children do as much of the work as possible. Here are some ideas to get your creative juices going:

**Make small items to give to an elderly neighbor or someone in a nursing home.** Even something as simple as a snowflake to hang in a window can lift the spirits.

**Help children understand that holidays are for sharing by adopting a needy family.** Take grandchildren along to help buy food and/or small gifts, then include them in the wrapping, packing and delivery process. If your finances don't allow this type of project, maybe you and the grandchildren could spend a day helping at a local food pantry.

**Teach them some new holiday songs and then go caroling.** Nursing home residents and hospital patients might especially enjoy being visited during the holidays. Consider also giving some trinkets and/or baked goodies that the grandchildren helped make.

**Make personalized drinking glasses from plain jelly glasses.** Have the children decorate them with liquid embroidery paints.

**Help them create place mats out of old holiday cards.** Let them arrange the cards on a piece of tag board or construction paper (11" x 16"). Glue the cards on the board or paper and allow to dry. Then cover both sides of the mat with a clear sealer or clear laminating sheets.

If there will be a "kids only" table at the holiday dinner, help them create their own tablecloth out of an old white sheet. Give them lots of sequins, glitter, markers, etc., and turn them loose.

**Read aloud a holiday book.** Some possibilities include The Littlest Angel by Charles Tazewell, or The Little Drummer Boy by Ezra Keats.

Based on an article by Loma G. Davies Silcott, Kansas Senior Press Service, from the December 1998 issue of "60 and Better," a newsletter from Douglas County Senior Services, Vol. 25, No. 12.
For some, holidays are a special time full of family, friends and activities. For others, they can be a time of loneliness and feelings of not fitting in when the “recognized” holidays are not a part of their culture or religion.

People of all cultures find ways to celebrate, and they do this for a variety of reasons. The recognition of religious, historical, cultural or patriotic events with festivities or ceremonies is common across cultures. Holidays are concentrated celebrations that serve important societal and group functions. They make it possible for individuals to gain a common identity as members of a group. These groups can form in various ways, such as along national, regional, ethnic, racial or religious lines.

Often a holiday in one country or culture has customs in common with a holiday in one or more areas of the world. For example, winter lights serve as a special holiday symbol, expressing people’s hopes for peace, freedom and understanding. Festivals of light are celebrated during Hanukkah, Diwali, Kwanzaa, Loi Krathong, Nacimiento and Christmas. Although observed on different dates, China, Vietnam and the United States celebrate the New Year. Independence Day is a holiday known as Bastille Day in France and celebrated on July 14th, while we commemorate our freedom in the United States on July 4th. These examples demonstrate that holidays and celebrations are not that different across nations.

With this in mind, the holidays are an excellent opportunity to expand understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. You can create new traditions throughout the year by investigating, incorporating and celebrating holidays from other cultures along with your own. To get started, read books about holidays and celebrations around the world with your family and discuss how they are similar and different from your own. You can add activities such as creating crafts, preparing foods, listening to music, playing games and inviting family and friends to join you in the celebration.

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Making holiday meals safe, balanced and enjoyable

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Much of our joy during the holiday season centers on food and sharing it with family and friends. Yet busy schedules and overcommitments can transform what should be enjoyable holiday meals into stressful events. And those fixing food may face special challenges when trying to prepare quantities of food under time-crunched deadlines.

Keep your holiday meals safe.
Practice safe food-handling techniques when entertaining during the holiday season. Holiday buffets require special cautions. Bacteria grow rapidly in foods left out for long periods of time. Keep tabs on the buffet table, and throw out any foods that have been sitting out for 2 hours or longer. Follow these 4 steps to keep food safe during the holidays.

1. Clean. Always wash hands with hot, soapy water before and after handling food. Keep your kitchen, dishes and utensils clean, too. Clean up kitchen surfaces with a clean cloth or paper towels. Always serve food on clean plates. Remind young chefs to wash hands thoroughly before handling food.

2. Separate. Keep raw meat, poultry and seafood away from fruits and vegetables so that juices will not cross-contaminate foods. Replace empty platters rather than adding fresh food to a dish that has already been used.

3. Cook. Cook foods thoroughly to safe temperatures. (Cook roast beef to 145°F for medium rare; whole poultry to 180°F, poultry breasts to 170°F and ground poultry to 165°F; all other meat, fish and ground beef to 160°F. To test fish for doneness, make sure it is opaque and flaky.)

Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Place hot foods in chafing dishes, crock pots and warming trays to keep them 140°F or warmer. Place cold foods in bowls of ice to keep them 40°F or colder.

4. Chill. Don’t let foods sit at room temperature for more than 2 hours. Promptly refrigerate and store all leftovers in small, shallow containers. Most cooked dishes can keep for up to 3-4 days in the refrigerator. Reheat thoroughly to 165°F when food is hot and steaming.

Add balance to your holiday meals.
Seasonal goodies taste great, but over-indulging during the holidays, or any other time, can lead to unwanted weight gain.

Put family back into holiday meals. Holiday meal times can be rushed, overwhelming, catch-as-catch-can, heavy on drive-through-dining, or even skipped entirely. Stop, reassess, and try these simple tips to create a calm holiday everyone can enjoy.

1. Turn off the television, and turn on some holiday music.
2. Set your table in festive ways, and add holiday colors.
3. Talk to each other and share pleasant conversation.
4. Try a new food. Encourage each family member to scan magazines and cookbooks for something he or she would like to help cook.
5. Plan some fun activities, and make the holiday special. Go for walks in conservation areas, build a snowman, cut out snowflakes and decorate windows, go caroling, or play board games with other family members.
6. Take your time, and enjoy the whole meal together. Shopping, sports, phone calls, computer games, movies and TV can wait.
7. Share memories, and talk about what makes your holiday special.
8. Linger after the meal and read a holiday book together.

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Just be flexible. Balance the food you eat and your physical activity over several days.

Enjoy a wide variety of treats from all the food groups. Add balance to your holiday table with fruits and vegetables. Packed with nutrients and naturally low in calories, fresh produce makes a colorful and healthful addition to every festive occasion. Serve veggies and low-fat dips before the meal, and offer fresh fruit salad as a dessert.

- **Another key to holiday health is physical activity.** Staying active is a great way to burn off excess calories and to relieve seasonal stress at the same time. Include fitness in all your holiday plans. Walk with a friend before shopping. Make a family event out of sledding or skating. For real stress relief, try something silly and physical, like snowball softball or making snow angels with the kids.

1. Plan ahead for holiday meetings and feasts. If you are over-hungry, it is natural to over-eat. The secret is to eat planning. When family members have a voice and active role in changing the way you do things, they will be more likely to support and adapt to the changes.

- Once you’ve decided to create a new tradition, look for resources. Some good places to start include libraries, cultural centers, museums, places of worship, colleges and universities, the Internet, as well as friends and family.

The list of resource materials on page 2 can help you get started.

Multicultural holiday celebrations
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One of the challenges you may face when creating new traditions is resistance from your family. This is normal; most of us do not like change. Reluctance to try something new may be due to the desire to preserve and perpetuate childhood memories. Most of us want to recreate for our families the happy celebrations we experienced as children. Reassure your family that the old traditions can be preserved while enhancing them with new activities that create a new family tradition. Create the new tradition together; get your family involved in the research, decision-making, and planning. When family members have a voice and active role in changing the way you do things, they will be more likely to support and adapt to the changes.

2. Stop fretting. Balance a heavy-duty holiday buffet by going light at breakfast and lunch beforehand. Make conscious choices. Enjoy, but don’t overdo. All the goodies will be around next year, and the year after that! Start with small portions, eat slowly and savor every bite.

Adapted in part from Fight BAC tool kit and EatRight Montana, 1999. See also http://www.fightbac.org/tools/holiday_tools/