

December, 2000

## Healthier Holidays

Sometimes we tend to err on the side of being too good to our family and guests over the holidays. We prepare an abundance of super rich foods, and serve in amounts more than they could reasonably eat. Be considerate, give guests a choice of eating on the lighter side if they prefer. Perhaps, you can cut the fat a bit in your holiday recipes without sacrificing good taste. Test out your recipe in advance. Or, prepare smaller portions of rich desserts and candies where altering the recipe is not feasible. A few less calories per serving can result in a larger overall savings. Here's some ways to "lighten" your holiday foods:

- ▶ Reduce fat by 1/4 to 1/3 in many baked products - muffins, nut breads, cakes.
- ▶ Saute celery, onions, mushrooms, etc. in broth or water rather than fat.
- ▶ In casseroles, use only 1/4-1/3 of the fat included in recipe.
- ▶ Substitute low-fat or fat-free versions of salad dressing, cottage cheese, sour cream and cream cheese in dips, salads, and casseroles. Or use half of the ingredients as lowfat or fat-free.
- ▶ Substitute two egg whites for each whole egg.
- ▶ Use canned evaporated skim milk in place of cream or half & half.
- ▶ Serve pretzels, lowfat popcorn, lower fat crackers like Melba rounds or water crackers, baked chips, & vegetables with lowfat dips, salsa, and spreads.
- ▶ Look over your menu. Is it balanced with higher and lower calorie options? Appetizers light & limited? Do you have some lighter vegetable dishes in addition to candied yams or vegetable casseroles? Is there a lower calorie salad? Can the bread be served in smaller portions? Can you slice the meat in smaller portions as well? Is there an assortment of desserts - some rich, some lighter, various portion sizes?
- ▶ Plan your menu, and invite family members to help bring various dishes

To limit holiday weight gain, don't skip meals! This only leads to overeating. Always eat before baking! Eat a high carbohydrate mini-meal before heading for a party. If your host seldom serves low calorie foods, take along your favorite light appetizer. Limit alcohol, and drink low-cal beverages or sparkling water. Walk! Make exercise a major personal priority during the holidays to reduce your stress, feel better,

### Inside this issue . . .

- ✓ Classic toys kids will love
- ✓ Plan for fun after the holidays
- ✓ Stress buster for family gatherings
- ✓ Helping a bereaved friend
- ✓ A gracious Thank You

burn calories, and improve your resistance to colds.

## 'Tis the Season for Toys, Toys, Toys

To most of us, Christmas means children and children mean toys. You'll find many toys in the stores that are delightful and imaginative. Don't be misled by all the new electronic gadgets, stick with classic toys that allow your children to play with them over and over.

- For children under two years select sturdy rattles, brightly colored objects, rubber or washable

squeak toys and stuffed dolls and animals and push and pull toys.

- Children two to three years old are in the exploring age. They'll enjoy a sandbox with bucket, shovel, and spoon; large peg boards; wooden animals; cars and wagons to push; tip-proof kiddie cars and tricycles; large crayons; low rocking horses; and small chairs and tables.
- Youngsters three to four years old like to pretend. Toys that adapt to their make-believe world include small brooms and carpet sweepers, toy telephones, dolls with simple wrap-around clothing, doll buggies and furniture, dishes, trucks and tractors, non-electrical trains, drums, costume clothes, and building blocks.
- From four to six, children continue to imitate adults, and they enjoy blackboards, simple construction toys, small irons, dolls, sewing materials and carpenters' benches.
- At eight years, children are ready for bicycles, electric trains, musical instruments, and gym equipment.

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## Post-Holiday Fun

In the hustle and bustle of getting ready for the holidays, its easy to become overwhelmed. The kids are out of school and you're trying to finish wrapping presents and prepare that holiday meal. Then Christmas is over, and what a let down! Other than returning that shirt that is the wrong size, what does your family have to look forward to?

How about planning a special outing for after the holidays? Look around your area for fun things that you and the kids can do. Think of something they will look forward to when the new Christmas toys have lost their first appeal.

One of our family favorites is a trip to Crown Center to go ice skating. Maybe your family would enjoy a quick ski trip to Weston. Or even a day with the neighbors playing Monopoly and baking cookies could be a special treat. The point is, don't try cramming all of your fun into the few days before Christmas. Save something to look forward to after the holiday

## Stress Busters for the Holidays

Whether we're married or single, parents or grand-parents, we all have a vision of what we would like the holiday season to be. Our visions may not be the same, but chances are that we share many of the same expectations. We want the holidays to be "perfect."

Families may be tight at this time of year, but so are family tensions, according to family therapist Dr. Frank Pittman. While holidays give families a chance to reconnect, they can also provide fertile ground for conflict. Deciding whom to invite to your house or which family to visit can be sources of tension. When families gather they expect a happy reunion, but often find that old patterns of behavior are played out as sibling rivalry and past grudges resurface.

### *For family get-togethers:*

1. Holiday togetherness has its pitfalls, but just because something awkward happens, don't let that ruin your holiday. Take it in stride - it happens in every family.
2. Be forewarned - it is the nature of families to try to place you into old family roles. You don't have to fall into them if you don't want.
3. See the holidays as a time to catch up and have positive interactions with relatives,

- but not to repair old wounds or bring up difficult topics.
4. Plan for potentially awkward times such as the hours between lunch and dinner. Offer to stay with the kids while others go to a movie. Organize a walk or bring some board games. But don't try to over-control.
  5. Don't try to do everything yourself or you'll end up resenting others. Decide ahead of time who will bring what.
  6. Be cool. It isn't worth arguing over every small criticism or getting resentful if you get unwanted advice. A sense of humor will go a long way to ease tension.

### *For single parents or step-families.*

7. Let kids know what to expect - who will pick them up, how long they will stay, where they will sleep, and how to contact the other parent.
8. Try to facilitate contact with the other parent's relatives. Arrange visits with grandparents and others if the child wants to see them and they want to see the child.
9. Find ways to make kids comfortable with new step-siblings. Make a special time for them to get to know each other over a game.
10. Honor rituals from previous families. Let everyone choose a special

### Q&A Q&A Q&A Q&A Q&A Q&A Q&A Q&A

**Q:** Our elderly neighbor's husband died last spring. What can we do to help her through the holidays?

**A:** During the holidays, we often get wrapped up in our own "busy-ness" and may not realize that there are those around us who are not as joyful about the holidays. The loss of a loved one can be especially difficult during the first holidays, birthdays and anniversaries without them. Begin by asking about her plans with extended families and other friends. Then, consider including her in baking with your children, take her shopping or to the post office, include her in holiday meals. Depression and the "holiday blues" are experienced by many. Having friends and family there to listen and help can ease your neighbor's first holiday without her husband.

dish, read a  
holiday story  
or sing that  
special song.  
Then add  
some new  
traditions of  
your own.

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## Saying Thanks...and Writing Thank You Notes

Your seven-year-old son rips open the present from Aunt Gertrude as she beams from the nearby chair. As the box tumbles open, a pair of cowboy pajamas fall out. "Oh, clothes," mumbles your son as he tosses them aside to move onto the other potentially more interesting gifts.

Embarrassment sets in! You quickly grab the pajamas and get eye contact with your son to help him remember his manners. "Thank you, Aunt Gertrude," your son mumbles as he begrudgingly takes time from

the other interesting-looking gifts.

Why don't our children appear more appreciative? How can we teach them to be more gracious? First of all, saying thank you is a learned response; we all have to work at being gracious. Hopefully, it comes more naturally for us, as adults, through practice.

Holidays are the perfect time for us to model good manners and thoughtfulness. Saying and writing thanks show respect and appreciation. Remind your

children just before gift giving, that they'll thank the givers after each gift (if that's your tradition). If the giver isn't there, remind your children that thank you notes will be written within a week of the gift (if that's your custom.)

To make thank you notes more personal, take a picture during gift opening so the giver sees the child with the gift and can relate to the moment. The child can then write the thanks on the back of the picture to send as the thank you note.