

Ten Holiday Tips

Each year, December brings a month filled with holidays and celebrations complete with a variety of gift giving traditions. Check out this list of holiday tips to keep you and your family safe and healthy this holiday season.

Buy safe toys. If you plan to buy toys for the kids in your life, choose age-appropriate toys and look for labels with safety advice. For young children, avoid toys with small parts, sharp edges, and electric toys that can heat up. Always purchase safety gear in addition to sports-related gifts or ride-on toys, such as bicycles or skateboards.

Celebrate on a budget. The holidays can be expensive, but you don't have to break the bank to celebrate. Take a few minutes to decide how much you can afford to spend on gifts, travel, parties, decorations, and other holiday expenses. Once you've created a spending plan, keep track of your purchases. Shopping online can help you stick to a budget, as you'll avoid the temptation of store displays and may be able to use coupons and promotion codes. Before you buy, look for free shipping offers, check ordering deadlines to ensure that your gifts will arrive on time, and read the return policy.

Give the gift of service. Sometimes the greatest gift you can give to others is service. Reading to a child just 3 hours a week significantly improves his or her reading skills, or if you help out at a local soup kitchen or food bank, you are directly providing meals to hungry individuals.

Find seasonal employment. Even in a tough economy, businesses need extra help around the holidays. Seasonal employment can help supplement your income and potentially lead to a permanent position.

Get through the holiday blues. The holidays aren't joyous for everyone. This time of year can bring stress and feelings of loneliness. Exercise, focusing on positive relationships, and doing things that you find rewarding can help with depression. Keep in mind that winter depression could be a sign of *seasonal affective disorder* (SAD), which is caused by the lack of sunlight. Treatment for SAD is much like treatment for other forms of depression, but may also involve light therapy.

Be safe and save money with LED lights. Electricity bills can grow during the holidays if you decorate with strings of lights. Consider switching to LED (*light-emitting diode*) holiday lights to save energy and money. In addition to the energy and cost savings, LED lights are much cooler than incandescent bulbs, reducing the risk of fires. Every holiday season, fires claim lives and cost millions in damage. To prevent holiday fires in your home, use nonflammable decorations, do not overload electrical sockets, and avoid the use of lit candles. As you should do year-round, ensure that your smoke alarms are working. If you celebrate Christmas, be sure to regularly water Christmas trees.

Pay attention to food portions and physical activity. The holidays are a wonderful time to celebrate with family and friends, but celebrations sometimes involve over-indulging in sweet treats and heavy foods. Even if you only gain only 1 or 2 pounds during the holidays, these gains can add up over the years. The holidays are probably not the ideal time to try to lose weight, but you can take steps to maintain your weight.

Pack for hassle-free air travel. You can get through the airport security line faster by traveling with unwrapped gifts and following the "3-1-1 rule" when carrying on liquids. You may have favorite liquid

food items (like cranberry sauce or special dips) that you want to share during the holidays, but it's best to put such items in your checked bag or ship them ahead of time. If you need last-minute information about what you can and can't bring through security, visit the TSA Web site at <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

Reduce holiday waste. The holiday season includes many opportunities to reduce waste, recycle, and reuse items. Consider buying rechargeable batteries (and a charger) for electronic gifts to help reduce the amount of harmful materials thrown away. After the holidays, look for ways to recycle your tree instead of sending it to a landfill. If you plan to send greeting cards, consider purchasing ones that are made of recycled paper or sending electronic greetings.

Keep food safe. Holiday buffets are convenient ways to entertain a crowd, but leaving food out for long periods of time can invite bacteria that cause food-borne illness. To keep your holiday foods safe, cook them thoroughly; use shallow containers; never leave them sitting out for more than two hours, and keep them at the appropriate temperature.

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