



Keeping Your Partner (And Yourself) Healthy During The Holidays

A Fact Sheet Prepared for the
Council on Contemporary Families

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The holiday season is one of the most festive times of the year. But the joys of Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and New Year's Eve have a dark side: the physical toll that comes from unhealthy eating and drinking, stressful travel, irregular sleep, and neglect of regular exercise. It's not just the body that suffers. Emotional health also may be threatened by the stress of shopping (especially during these financially difficult times), by long-simmering family tensions, and by the pressure to create the "perfect" occasion.

Keeping healthy during the holiday season isn't something we need to do alone, however. Decades of research by social scientists show that good relationships keep us healthy. Our spouses and partners can help us to eat and sleep well, motivate us to exercise, and provide emotional support during stressful times. Here are ten tips to keep yourself (and your families) healthy this holiday season.

1. **Exercise Together.** It's hard enough to exercise regularly during the year, never mind during the hectic holiday season. Families can pre-schedule a 30 minute exercise time for each day of the holiday break. Taking an early morning jog or a leisurely walk after dinner is more fun when you do it together.
2. **Say When, When It Comes to Food.** The average person gains a pound over the holidays, which may not sound like much but can really add up over the years. You and your family members can choose your favorite holiday treats and then agree to limit the amount of tempting foods you keep in the house. Skip fat-laden appetizers and serve veggies with salsa, humus, or Thai dipping sauce. Indulge sweet tooths with apple slices, mandarin orange wedges, and dates. Partners can also help each other resist the extra serving. Remember to nudge, not nag. Singles can enlist the help of friends.
3. **Drink in Moderation.** Couples can make a pact about drinking, as well as food. Decide in advance how many drinks you'll have, tell your partner, and then vow to stick to this. Give each other license to say "you've had enough." Again, remember to nudge, not nag. (If you or your partner cannot resist the temptation to drink, however, do consider seeking professional help). Hosts should be sure to have a selection of sparkling waters and interesting juices. Try cucumber blended with cilantro, pineapple, and apple-pear juice.
4. **Keep a Regular Bed Time.** Irregular sleep is one of the biggest taxes on good health over the holidays. Partners can decide before the party the best time to leave and "precommit" to it -including appointing one of you to keep track of time and make sure you leave the holiday party at a set hour. It's easier to say "sorry, we have to leave," or "I know she'd love to stay, but she has a meeting in the morning" if you've made a plan ahead of time and one person is appointed to keep track.

5. **Split the Driving.** Holidays often involve long drives to family and friends. Icy roads, traffic, and sheer exhaustion all increase the chances of a car accident. Partners can divide up the driving, to ensure that the passenger can rest and recover while the driver focuses on the road. When your partner is driving make sure you are the only one using the cell phone.
6. **Find Couple Time.** Even the best relationship can suffer when you are surrounded by energetic children, nagging in-laws, and annoying distant cousins. Take an hour away from the family festivities to take a nap, go for a walk, have a quiet conversation, or make love.
7. **Sneak Away for Alone Time.** Everyone needs time alone to breathe. If the family closeness gets to be too much, just take a break. Your partner can "cover" for you by telling family members that you needed a few minutes to be on your own, away from the celebration. Partners can discuss, before the family gathering, how they can support the other taking a quick get-a-way.
8. **Share The Burden.** Women often shoulder the burden of the holidays, doing everything from shopping, wrapping gifts, cooking, sending holiday cards, and organizing travel. This stress can be overwhelming. Make a list of tasks, and then divide it up among family members, including children. If everyone chooses some tasks, this takes the load off of Mom and makes the holiday a true family affair. And if the wrapping isn't as perfect as Mom's, who really cares?
9. **Have Realistic Expectations.** Movies about heartwarming holiday celebrations, and TV ads showing couples swapping the perfect gift are fiction. Think realistically about what your family really is, what you can afford, and what holidays have been like in the past. Keeping expectations in line with reality helps to keep everyone happy.
10. **Put Your Health First.** Martyrs seldom live long lives. Take care of your own health first: Take time to sleep, wash your hands, go for a walk. If one household member gets sick, the others are sure to follow. Keeping yourself healthy keeps your entire family healthy.

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About CCF

The Council on Contemporary Families is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to providing the press and public with the latest research and best-practice findings about American families. Our members include demographers, economists, family therapists, historians, political scientists, psychologists, social workers, sociologists, as well as other family social scientists and practitioners.

Founded in 1996 and now based in the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Miami, the Council's mission is to enhance the national understanding of how and why contemporary families are changing, what needs and challenges they face, and how these needs can best be met. To fulfill that mission, the Council holds annual conferences, open to the public, and issues periodic briefing papers and fact sheets.

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