



# Family Matters

November/December 2004

A Family Newsletter prepared by Iowa State University Extension Family Specialists

## Surviving the Holiday Roller-Coaster

The winter holiday season always seem to bring plenty of emotions - both highs and lows. If your family situation has the potential for triggering some emotional lows this year, the best thing you can do is plan ahead and be prepared. Dr. Susan Heitler, marriage educator and therapist, provides some advice to avoid emotional crashes in potentially difficult holiday situations.

### Home Alone Blues

The best advice is to plan far ahead. Make a list of others who may be far from family this year. Join together for celebrations and meals. Alternatively, volunteer. By helping others during the holidays you can help yourself to the enriching camaraderie that exists when people roll up their sleeves and pitch in.

### Empty Chair Syndrome

Instead of dwelling on thoughts of the missing loved one, focus on the people who are there. You can't block nostalgic thoughts from coming up, but you can choose how soon you leave recollections of the past to focus on the present.



### Excessive Altruism

Set realistic limits this year. Consider how much time, money and energy you can give without beginning to feel that you are over giving and running on empty. Simplify, request help when needed, and delegate.

### Tug of War

Battles over which family or friends the holidays are spent with can often be avoided by setting up a predictable schedule of alternating holidays or years that everyone agrees on.

### Kitchen Slavery

Do not chain yourself to the stove when everyone else is in the living room talking and laughing? Designate a kitchen crew so a fun group works together on everything from table setting to cutting carrots. Alternatively, specify potluck.

### Target Practice

Some family members specialize in critical comments; try thinking about what may be causing the negativity rather than focusing on the negative remarks. Is the criticizer chronically depressed, overstressed, jealous, or fearful? Criticism usually means the speaker has a problem, not the receiver.

### People Overload

Different people have different tolerances for time in crowds. Know your optimum dosages, and plan accordingly. As soon as frazzled feelings begin to irritate you, leave the hubbub by taking a walk outside or a brief nap in an extra bedroom.

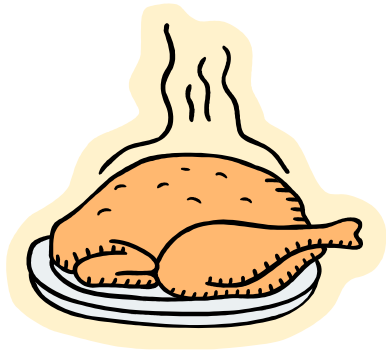
### Performance-itis

Do you feel you have to create the perfect holiday? Remember the holidays are neither a test nor a stage production. Holidays are holy-days. Let yourself take time to reflect on the important values in your life. Take a deep breath, look around you. For what do you feel thankful? Enjoy!

## The Big Thaw

Turkeys must be kept at a safe temperature during thawing. While frozen, a turkey is safe indefinitely.

However, if the turkey is allowed to thaw at a temperature above 40° F, any harmful bacteria that may have been present before freezing can begin to grow again unless proper thawing methods are used.



A package of frozen meat or poultry thawing on the counter longer than 2 hours is not safe. Even though the center of the package may still be frozen, the outer layer of the food is in the "danger zone," between 40° and 140° F -- a temperature range where harmful bacteria multiply rapidly.

There are three safe ways to thaw food: in the refrigerator, in cold water, and in the microwave oven. Frozen turkeys should not be thawed on the back porch, in the car trunk, in the basement or on the kitchen counter.

**Refrigerator thawing:** Plan ahead. For every 5 pounds of turkey, allow approximately 24 hours of thawing time in the refrigerator.

**Microwave thawing:** Follow the manufacturer's instructions when thawing a turkey in the microwave oven. Plan to cook it immediately after thawing because some areas of the turkey may become warm and begin to cook during microwave thawing. Most turkeys are too large for effective microwave thawing.

**Cold water thawing:** Allow about 30 minutes per pound when thawing a turkey in cold water. Be sure the turkey is in leak-proof packaging. Tissues can absorb water like a sponge, resulting in a watery product. Submerge the turkey in cold water. Change the water every 30 minutes until the turkey is thawed.

Turkeys thawed by the cold-water method should be cooked immediately because conditions were not temperature controlled.

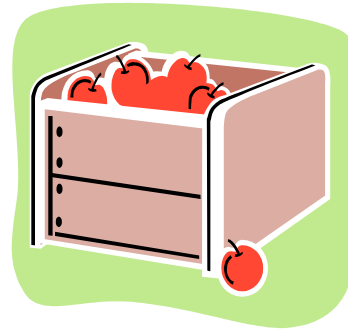
For further information, contact: USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline: 1-888-674-6854. E-mail:

[mph hotline@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:mph hotline@fsis.usda.gov).

ISU Answerline at 1-800-262-3804

[www.extension.iastate.edu/answerline/](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/answerline/)

## How Many Apples?



One pound of apples = 2 large, 3 medium, or 4 to 5 small; about 3 cups peeled and cut-up fruit. Two pounds of apples = enough for one nine-inch pie.

## Strive for Five in 2005 with Lighten Up Iowa!!

Physical inactivity and overweight are growing in epidemic proportions. You can join in a movement to make a difference in your life and the lives of those around you. **Lighten Up Iowa and Go the Distance** are five month challenge programs beginning January 19, 2005, that encourage Iowa adults and youth to change their lifestyles by

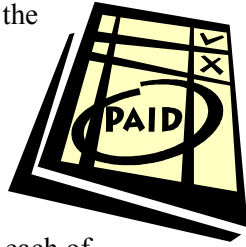


developing healthy activity and eating habits. To join this statewide movement to improve your eating and physical activity habits all you have to do is visit the Web site [www.lightenupiaowa.org](http://www.lightenupiaowa.org). Enrollment can be done directly from the Web site. Information for signing up for the project may also be obtained by contacting your local ISU Extension office.

# Ten Ways to Avoid Post-Holiday Financial Stress

For too many people, the months of December, January and February are incredibly difficult, due to a combination of holiday bills and winter heating bills. Overspending can also increase the overall cost of the season, through late fees and interest on the unpaid balances on credit cards. This year, *Family Matters* offers a “top ten list” to help you avoid post-holiday financial headaches.

**1. Pay the basic bills first.** This is the most important tip of all. Never let holiday spending put your basic financial security at risk. Pay all essential bills on time as usual.



**2. Plan ahead – know your limits.** Look at your total income for each of

(housing, food, transportation, ...). The money remaining is what you have available for holiday expenses. Don't fret if it doesn't seem like enough. Tips below give ideas on ways to stretch it.

**3. Remember to plan for more than gift-giving.** Decorations, food, parties, babysitters, travel, cards, postage – all these expenses also fall into the holiday months. If you make a plan for basic household expenses and gifts, but forget to plan for “other” holiday costs, you could find yourself unexpectedly in the hole by hundreds of dollars.

**4. Don't spend a lot on things that will be thrown away.** Wrapping paper is the obvious example here. Buy inexpensive wrapping paper, or make your own (or have the children or grandchildren make it for you). Decorate plain brown bags for gift bags, make your own gift tags, buy inexpensive curly ribbon instead of expensive bows. When it comes to gift-wrap, spending a lot doesn't really improve the gift.

**5. Use your skills to make gifts.** Gifts of food can be inexpensive, and are very welcome – whether it's homemade mixes, cookies and candies, breads, popcorn balls, or canned goods. A photo collage or scrapbook is a wonderful gift, as are handmade crafts of all types. Gardeners, can give gift certificates (redeemable in the spring) for transplants of perennials. Think about what you're good at, and look for ways to share it.

**6. Gifts of time are high-value, low-cost.** Gift certificates for your time can be the most valuable gift of all – whether it's an offer to take care of children, to take someone shopping, to shovel walks or wash windows or install a new outlet. Homework help every Tuesday, or haircuts, or backrubs – look for a match between your skills and others' needs and likes.

**7. Protect your credit.** Over-extended credit creates financial costs (interest, late fees, over-limit fees). It can also limit your *opportunities*. Your credit record may be used by landlords or employers to determine whether you are a desirable renter or employee, or by insurance companies to decide whether they will insure you and how high your premiums will be. Paying bills on time and avoiding excess debt pays off in many ways, so don't let the holiday season damage your credit record.

**8. Keep track of paperwork and receipts.** There's always a chance you may want to return something – keep receipts in a safe place. Having receipts on hand will also help you verify credit card bills and bank statements. Keeping receipts is an easy way to avoid costly problems.

**9. Don't spend your tax refund before you get it.** People who anticipate a large tax refund often overspend during the holidays, knowing they can get their tax refund in February and cover the bills before it's too late. This is a costly and risky strategy. Instead, keep this year's spending in line and when you get your refund, then *save* some for *next* year's holiday expenses.

**10. Teach children/grandchildren to value holiday traditions and family time more than gifts.** We teach by example. If we place emphasis on the rituals of decorating the house, or baking pies, or visiting special people, or seeing the lights in the community, our children will also learn to value those parts of the holiday season.

**Bonus Item #11: How much you spend isn't a measure of how much you care.** In many cases, an actual gift is unimportant – teachers, co-workers, and others may get more pleasure from a thoughtful note of appreciation. Where giving gifts is important, remember that low-cost but personally-selected gifts may mean more in the long run than any expensive purchased item.