

# Words on Wellness

Your extension connection to nutrition and fitness



## Gifts from the Kitchen Come Straight From the Heart

Be creative and give gifts from your kitchen this year! Gifts of food are personal, usually less expensive, and include a bit of your heart. Creating your own unique food gift means you can select items you know the receiver will like. The recipients know you were thinking of them as you prepared their special gift.

Make a gift basket with fresh fruit or ingredient items to make a particular dish. Prepare a main dish, freeze it, and give to busy parents or someone living alone. No time to cook now? Consider coupons for a food item given at a later date. Who wouldn't like to get a coupon for a special food, dish, or meal they can enjoy sometime in 2011?

Here are some easy-to-put-together food gift ideas:

- Basket of fresh fruits and vegetables
- A collection of salt-free seasonings, herbs, or spices
- English muffins, scones, or crackers with a jar of fruit preserves or spreads
- A variety of salsas
- Mixed nuts and dried fruits
- Cider mulling spices or flavored coffees and teas



## Tame Holiday Calories

Holiday special events are a time when families and friends gather and celebrate. Often the celebrations center around holiday treats. Try these tips to enjoy holiday foods without adding pounds.

- **Don't go to a party hungry.** When we're hungry, we tend to overeat. Eating a healthy snack before you go may take the edge off your appetite.
- **Take your own platter.** If it's a potluck event, take a fresh fruit or vegetable tray with low-fat dip or a cheese tray with reduced fat cheeses and whole grain crackers. More than likely you aren't the only one who wants to stay healthy during the holidays.
- **Limit high-fat foods.** High-fat foods include fried or cheese-filled items, pastries, processed meats, and cream-based dishes. Store high-calorie foods out of sight. Keep healthy snacks on hand such as fruit, cut-up veggies, and whole grain crackers.
- **Watch portions.** Enjoy your holiday favorites, just eat less of them. Aim for smaller portions. The first bite introduces the flavor and texture of a food, but will likely taste the same as the last bite. Remember, moderation!
- **Survey your options.** At a buffet, survey the table before getting in line to choose foods. Select a smaller plate and a variety of foods. Reduce temptation by choosing a seat well away from the buffet table.
- **Eat slowly and enjoy your food.** Return your fork to the plate after each bite, and chew slowly to enjoy the flavor and texture of the food.
- **Drink water.** Stay well hydrated. For a change, drink sparkling water or add a sugar-free flavoring pouch.
- **Limit Alcohol.** Alcohol provides extra calories. If you drink, limit the amount.

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## Get Answers on Holiday Food Safety

It's that time again...time for holiday food safety questions! Call Iowa State University Extension's AnswerLine (1-800-262-3804) or check out these reliable sources for answers to your questions. USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline 1-888-674-6854 (Answers in English or Spanish) from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays. USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service offers the "Ask Karen" service at [http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Food\\_Safety\\_Education/Ask\\_Karen/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Safety_Education/Ask_Karen/index.asp). You can type in your food safety question and receive a list of questions and answers related to your inquiry.

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

## Be Active, Indoors or Out!

Don't ignore physical activity during the holidays. Activity helps reduce feelings of stress and can give you extra energy. Even in cold snowy weather, you can bundle up and enjoy a winter walk or other calorie-burning activities such as sledding, ice skating, cross-country skiing, and snow shoeing.

If cold, snowy weather doesn't motivate you to enjoy outdoor activities, winter is still a great time to try indoor physical activities:

- Go to the gym or recreation center
- Pop in an exercise video, or an active video game (e.g., Wii®)
- Set up an activity tournament with competitions: Who can do the most jumping jacks in one minute? Who can jump on one leg the longest without falling over? Who can do the most push-ups? Play follow-the-leader throughout the house to your favorite music. Brainstorm other ideas for an indoor activity tournament.



## Take Time for Family Mealtime

With the hustle and bustle of the season, it's still important to take time to eat meals with your family. When you have family meals together, you are making positive memories. And research shows many benefits of family mealtime.

Families are more likely to eat a nutritious meal when they eat together. Children who eat with their families are likely to eat more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Research shows adolescents are also less likely to smoke, drink, and use illegal drugs during their teen years if their family eats meals together regularly. Enjoying meals together enhances family communication and improves manners.

Enjoy meals with your family whether it's around the kitchen table, at a restaurant where you can talk together, or spreading a blanket on the living room floor for an indoor picnic. The important factor is to eat together and share conversation.

Don't know what to talk about when you're eating together? Make a list of questions to get the conversation flowing. Or pick up a set of Conversation Cards (EDC 0248) at your local ISU Extension Office.

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