

8 Holiday Time Savers

Not up to the holiday demands this year? Many people dread the stress of December. A primary source is lack of time. Here are some ways to lose the frenzy and capture the peace and pleasure of this season.

1 First remember, your time and energy are precious. It's okay to choose what you want, especially during the holidays.

2 Make a list and timeline of activities, gatherings and errands. Getting organized can keep you on track and on budget.

3 Learn to say no to things that aren't necessary or to make room for more important activities. How to say no: *No. Can't do it. Not this time.*

4 Ask for help with chores others can fulfill. They may be willing to lend a hand in the spirit of the season.

5 Don't wait until the last minute. Rushing may cost you time and money, cause mistakes, produce stress and spoil your fun.

6 Keep others informed. Good communication saves confusion, time and grumpy moods.

7 Find some solitude. A few relaxing moments 2 or 3 times a day will reward you with renewed energy to complete your tasks.

8 Stay powered up with light, no-nonsense meals, such as soups, whole grains and quick omelettes loaded with healthful veggies.

Slow down, savour the moments and try not to rush so fast through the season that you miss the good stuff. A realistic attitude and sense of humour are your best friends.

◆ **New research shows that vitamin D might help keep your brain healthy:** Older adults with low levels of vitamin D were more likely to have heart disease, osteoporosis, diabetes, obesity and mental impairment. People with very low levels of vitamin D were significantly less able to organize and plan tasks. Ask your health care provider about your personal vitamin D needs and the best sources.

◆ **How's your cell phone etiquette?** Taking calls in the middle of a meeting or conversation conveys a message that the caller is more important than the people in front of you. If you must take the call, excuse yourself and stay on the phone only long enough to either put the caller on hold or say you'll call back later. Unless you are expecting an urgent message, put the phone on mute.

◆ **Snow hazards:** Watch it when shovelling and lifting lots of heavy, wet snow. If you're out of shape and have risks for heart disease, you could invite muscle strain or even a heart attack. Work slowly and rest often, especially if you are overweight or have high blood pressure. Don't shovel after smoking, drinking alcohol, or eating a heavy meal – activities that can also burden your cardiovascular system.

Holidays on a Budget

It's hard to imagine celebrating holidays without special foods, decorations, gifts and big gatherings. Before you pull out your wallet, consider how you can enjoy the spirit of the season on a budget with these tips from Money Management International, a non-profit credit counselling service.

Don't get left with leftovers.

Prepare only what you need. *Tip:* Familiarize yourself with portion sizes at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/basics-base/serving-portion-eng.php>.

Stick to basics. Why buy an expensive vegetable platter when you can make your own? Buy pre-cut vegetables or enlist friends to cut and arrange food.

Make it a group effort. You spend less when you host a potluck. Plus, everyone gets to enjoy a variety of dishes.

Get a loan. If you're short on supplies, ask around. Chances are



someone has what you need, whether it's chairs, dishes or other items used only a few times a year.

Try hand-made. Consider making gifts instead – a family recipe book, gift certificates for free babysitting or chores, or even jewellery or clothing if you're crafty.

Hunt for bargains. Watch for markdowns on foods close to the holidays. Shop after-holiday sales for basics such as party supplies, but only if you've run out of them.

Make it a day of giving. Take your potluck or party on the road, to a nursing home or a less fortunate family.

Q: What is shingles? – Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAFP

A: It's a burning, tingling rash caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox, namely the Herpes zoster virus. After an initial bout of chickenpox, usually during childhood, the causative virus lies dormant inside nerve cells near the spinal cord. If the virus becomes active again, it causes shingles. About 2 out of 10 people who have had chickenpox will develop shingles at some point, most often after age 50.

Risks. Shingles can be triggered by depression, stress, physical trauma, and diseases or treatments that suppress the immune system.

Remedies. Antiviral drugs can reduce the length and severity of shingles if started promptly after the rash appears; they also reduce the likelihood of developing painful after-effects called postherpetic neuralgia. A vaccine is available for people 60 and older to prevent shingles.



STRAIN OR SPRAIN?

By Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAFP

Strains and sprains usually occur as the result of a single, abrupt action. The symptoms are similar – most frequently pain and swelling. Here's what makes them different:

Strain is an injury caused by overstretching or tearing a muscle. It is sometimes called a "pulled" muscle. Mild strains result in minute tears in a few muscle fibres. In more severe strains, the fibres may suffer a major tear with the loss of muscle strength or movement.

Muscles most vulnerable to strains include the hamstring, thigh, groin and shoulder. Conditions that increase the risk of a strain include lack of conditioning, poor flexibility, fatigue or a previous injury.

Sprain is an injury to the ligaments and soft tissues that surround and support a joint. These injuries, which range from mild tears to complete ruptures, tend to be more serious than strains. They can take longer to heal and, in severe cases, can result in an unstable joint.

Ankles, knees and wrists are the joints most susceptible to sprains. The injury often results from a sudden, twisting motion.

Note: Seek medical care if the injury is severely painful, swollen, or discoloured; is weak, numb, or deformed; or produces symptoms beyond 2 days.

5 Best Exercise Motivators

1. Know your goals. Set a reasonable timeline and stay positive about your efforts. Example: You may want to try strenuous exercise in a rush to lose weight, but pushing too hard too fast can lead to injury and setback. Progress gradually if you are new to regular exercise.

2. Get professional tips. Talk to your health care provider first, especially if you have physical limitations. Find out what activities suit your fitness level. *Tip:* Your provider might recommend a personal trainer, who can help you design a customized routine to ensure your safety and results.

3. Guard your exercise time jealously. The busiest people manage to fit in their exercise routines, and so can you. Plot a course in your calendar every week, and make sure you and others understand this time is non-negotiable. *Tip:* Seek opportunities to fit in exercise bits throughout every day.

4. Make exercise convenient. Lose the hassles or you may lose interest. Examples: Choose a gym, pool or walking trail close to home or work. If you're a home exerciser, set up your equipment in an area that's inviting and comfortable.

5. Choose some favourite activities you'll pursue for life. *Tip:* Think about what suits your personality, lifestyle, fitness level and changing moods. Don't feel like lifting weights? Walk your dog. Vary your exercise – from tai chi to golf to group aerobics – as you vary your other interests in life.



Body Bulletin Canada takeaway for 2011: Start a new exercise plan and start making a difference for yourself.

Safe Gift Guide

Giving the gift of safety this year?

Here's a list of thoughtful ideas:

First-aid kits: Everyone can use one of these. They come in all sizes; some are perfect for backpacks and others are great for the car.

Earplugs or earmuffs:

Help a family member or friend – who frequents concerts, uses a snow blower or other loud power tools – protect their hearing.

Backup alert signals for vehicles:

Beepers or lights that alert people to vehicles backing up come in easy-to-install and no-install wireless versions.



Roadside emergency kits: This is a must-have for everyone in your life who drives.

Emergency blanket: This is usually waterproof on one side and can double as a picnic blanket. Keep in your car or in an emergency preparedness kit.

Survival in a can: Little kits as small as a sardine can contain survival gadgets, such as a compass, matches, whistle, etc.

You can find most of these helpful gifts at your local home centre or online.

Medication User's Guide

Many people take non-prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) medications. Even with proper use, these medications can sometimes cause adverse effects.

The most common complications are allergic reactions and interactions of OTC medications with food, alcohol or other drugs. Here are some safety suggestions:

- **At least every 6 months,** make a list of all the medications you take – including all herbs, supplements or vitamins – and give it to your health care provider.
- **Don't take medication with alcohol.** If you have more than one alcoholic drink a week, get medical advice before taking any medications.
- **Read directions.** Do not take medication at higher doses, for longer periods or more frequently than instructed. Take the drug with food – or not – as directed.
- **Don't take vitamins at the same time as medicine.**
- **Don't stir medicine into food or drinks** and don't open capsules or split pills without your provider's approval.
- **Don't double up on medications** – for example, taking a pain reliever and a cold remedy containing the same ingredient.
- **If you experience itching, hives or trouble breathing,** stop taking the medication and get medical help immediately.

Be alert: When taking OTC medications watch for and track any symptoms or side effects on a calendar; report them to your provider without delay.

Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

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Holiday Trimming

A Cheer for Moderation



During the holiday season, it's easy to over-indulge in sweets, drinks, finger foods and calories in general. We're talking about several weeks of temptation – a challenge for everyone, especially people who are already overweight. It's no fun feeling anxious and out of control about eating.

You don't have to abandon your health and weight goals. Practice moderation with these easy strategies.

Have lower-calorie days to save for a special dessert, dinner out or a party. Make everyday meals simple and light – maybe a bowl of hot soup for dinner? See the recipe at right.

Keep track of nibbling, especially those appetizers. Major calories lurk in tiny sausage rolls and bites of fudge.

Drink water. It may help you feel full and fight fatigue.

No seconds. If you eat slowly and drink plenty of water you shouldn't feel the need to have more.

Can't resist pies, cookies and such? Have just a little, or choose light options.

Avoid alcohol. It's full of empty calories and may increase your appetite and decrease your self-restraint.

Let your waistband be your guide. If your clothes begin to feel snug, cut back or exercise more.

Try a buddy system. If you and a friend are concerned about holiday weight gain, make a pact: Coach each other about making smart choices. Start exercising together.

Get plenty of rest to relieve stress and fatigue that might trigger overeating or drinking too much.

Exercise every day. You'll offset extra calories, increase metabolism and get focused on your healthy intentions. Be active 60 minutes every day, which is Health Canada's recommendation for good health (with your health care provider's okay).

Lost your resolve? Don't waste time and energy feeling guilty. With a little effort, you'll soon return to eating better.

Golden Potato Soup

- 1 tbsp/15ml extra virgin olive oil
- 1 medium onion, thinly sliced
- 1 medium leek, thinly sliced
- ½ tsp/2ml dried thyme
- 4 medium unpeeled Yukon Gold potatoes, diced
- 2 14.5-oz cans/428ml low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 cup/250ml low-fat buttermilk
- 2 tbsp/25ml real bacon bits
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 4 scallions, chopped



- 1 In a medium pot, sauté onion and leek until tender; stir in thyme.
- 2 Add potatoes and broth; bring to a boil, then cover and simmer 30 minutes until potatoes are tender.
- 3 Stir in buttermilk, bacon bits, salt and pepper, and heat on low about 5 minutes.
- 4 Garnish each bowl full with chopped scallion and serve hot.

Nutrition Facts

MAKES 4 (2-CUP/500ml) SERVINGS.

Amount Per Serving	
Calories 273	
Total Fat 5.4g	Total Carbohydrate 46.5g
Saturated Fat 1g	Dietary Fibre 5.7g
Cholesterol 2.5mg	Sugars 6.1g
Sodium 255mg	Protein 12g

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