

Stay Healthy for the Holidays



Returning to Routine

When the holidays wind down, many people feel a familiar pull to reset.

Advertisements and social media often promote dramatic overhauls — strict diets, intense workout plans or rigid routines meant to undo seasonal indulgences.

Health experts suggest a different approach: One rooted in balance, not punishment.

The first step is shifting the mindset. Denice Taylor, a registered dietitian nutritionist, reminds readers of Texas Health that it is normal to enjoy seasonal traditions and that a few indulgent meals aren't going to undo all your good habits.

Letting go of guilt can make it easier to move forward in a positive, sustainable way.

A gentle reset focuses on small, consistent habits. Reestablishing a regular sleep schedule is an effective place to start. Late nights and disrupted routines are common during the holidays, and returning to steady sleep patterns can improve energy, mood and overall health.

Nutrition is another area where moderation matters. Instead of restrictive dieting, experts recommend easing back into balanced meals — adding more fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins while still allowing room for enjoyment. Hydration supports the transition.



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Taylor further recommends enjoying intentional meals. Sit at a table, eliminate distractions and focus on how your body feels as you eat while savoring the flavors.

“It takes your brain about 20 minutes to recognize fullness. So slow down, savor your food, and consider pausing about 15 minutes into your meal to check how you’re feeling,” she recommends. “If you’re still hungry, eat a bit more, but give yourself the time to make intentional choices.”

Movement doesn't have to be intense to be effective. A re-

turn to regular physical activity, whether that's walking, stretching or a favorite fitness class, can help restore physical and mental well-being. Choose activities that feel enjoyable rather than obligatory. Consider having “mini-sessions” of activity that are just five to ten minutes long and can be scattered throughout the day.

“The Department of Health and Human Services recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week for adults,” Taylor explains. “That can ini-

tially sound really daunting, but breaking it down into manageable chunks, like a brisk walk or a quick home workout, can make it more achievable.”

Reset routines beyond diet and exercise. Tidying up living spaces, organizing schedules and setting realistic priorities can create a sense of calm. Even small actions, like clearing a cluttered countertop or planning the week ahead, can provide a feeling of momentum.

Emotional well-being deserves equal attention. Healthline reports that 62% of

Americans say they have very or somewhat elevated stress levels during the holidays. The post-holiday period can bring a mix of relief, fatigue or even a sense of letdown. Take time to reflect on what felt meaningful, what brought joy and what might be approached differently next time.

For some, reconnecting with habits such as journaling, mindfulness or social connection can help ease the shift back to routine. Scheduling time with friends or engaging in a favorite hobby can provide continuity and comfort.

Finding Calm Amid Chaos

For many people, the holidays are filled with joy and connection. For others, especially those who are neurodivergent or sensitive to sensory input, the season can feel overwhelming.

Bright lights, crowded gatherings, loud music and packed schedules can quickly turn festive environments into sources of stress.

Creating a more comfortable holiday experience starts with recognizing those challenges and planning with intention.

One of the most effective strategies is managing sensory input. Adjusting lighting by using softer bulbs, candles or natural light can make a space feel calmer. Lowering background noise, turning off televisions when not in use or creating playlists with gentler music can reduce auditory overload.

CREATING QUIET

In larger gatherings, having access to a quiet space can be especially helpful. A separate room, a cozy corner or even a short step outside can provide a place to decompress when things feel too intense. For hosts, designating a low-stimulation area can make gatherings more inclusive for all guests.



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Planning eases anxiety. Knowing what to expect, such as who will be there, how long an event will last and what the environment will be like, can help individuals prepare. For some, this might include bringing comfort items such as noise-canceling headphones, sunglasses or familiar objects that provide a sense of grounding.

SETTING LIMITS

Setting boundaries is another

important tool. It's OK to limit the number of events attended, arrive later, leave earlier or take breaks as needed. Clear communication with family, friends or hosts can help set expectations and reduce pressure.

For families with children, especially those with sensory sensitivities, creating a flexible schedule can make a significant difference. Balancing social activities with downtime allows for rest and recovery,

helping prevent overstimulation before it builds.

Visual clutter can contribute to stress. While decorations are a cherished part of the season, simplifying displays or focusing on a few meaningful elements can create a more calming environment. The goal is not to eliminate festivity, but to shape it in a way that feels supportive.

It's equally important to normalize different ways of participating. Some individu-

als may prefer smaller gatherings, daytime events or one-on-one interactions. Others may choose to celebrate in quieter ways at home. All these approaches are valid.

Ultimately, reducing holiday overstimulation is about making space for comfort and choice. By adjusting environments, setting boundaries and embracing flexibility, individuals and families can create celebrations that feel not only festive, but truly welcoming.

Telehealth During the Holidays

The holidays are a time when routines shift and schedules fill quickly. They're also a time when many medical offices reduce hours or close altogether.

Whether you're traveling, hosting guests or simply managing a busy season, accessing care can feel more complicated than usual.

Telehealth and virtual care options offer a practical solution, helping people stay connected to health services no matter where they are.

ADVANTAGES OF TELEHEALTH

Telehealth allows patients to consult with health care providers through video calls, phone visits or secure messaging. Many primary care offices, urgent care systems and insurance providers now offer virtual appointments, making it easier to address common concerns such as colds, minor infections, medication questions or ongoing condition management.

One of the biggest advantages during the holidays is convenience. Instead of trying to fit an in-person visit into a packed schedule or searching for an open clinic while away from home patients can often connect with a provider from their own living room or hotel room.



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KNOW YOUR COVERAGE

Before the holidays, it's a good idea to check whether your primary care provider offers virtual visits and how to access them. Many practices use patient portals or dedicated apps, which may require setting up accounts in advance.

Review your insurance coverage. While telehealth is widely available, coverage can vary depending on the provider and the type of visit. Knowing what services are included can help avoid

unexpected costs.

For those managing chronic conditions, telehealth can help maintain continuity of care. Scheduling a virtual check-in, ensuring prescriptions are up to date and having a plan for addressing potential flare-ups can provide peace of mind during a time when regular routines are disrupted.

Virtual care can be valuable for mental health support. The holidays can bring stress, loneliness or emotional strain, and many counseling services now offer teletherapy

sessions that are accessible from anywhere.

PREPARING FOR A VISIT

When using telehealth, a few simple steps can improve the experience. Choosing a quiet, well-lit space, ensuring a stable internet connection and having a list of symptoms or questions ready can help make appointments more efficient.

Keeping medications or health records nearby can be useful if questions arise.

While telehealth is a convenient option, it's important to

recognize its limits. Serious or emergency conditions still require in-person care.

Knowing the location of nearby urgent care centers or hospitals, especially when traveling, remains an important part of holiday planning.

As health care continues to evolve, telehealth is becoming an increasingly important tool for maintaining well-being. During the holidays, it offers a way to stay connected to care, even when life is on the move, helping ensure that health doesn't take a back seat to the season's celebrations.

Keeping Kids Active

When school lets out for the holidays, routines shift quickly. Bedtimes stretch later, schedules open up and screen time often expands to fill the gaps.

While some extra downtime can be a welcome break, maintaining a balance between rest and movement can help children stay healthy, energized and engaged.

The good news is that keeping kids active doesn't have to mean structured workouts or complicated plans. In fact, the most effective approaches often feel like play.

DAILY MOVEMENT

One simple strategy is to build movement into daily routines. Short bursts of activity, such as a family walk after meals, a quick dance break or a game of tag in the backyard, can add up over the course of the day. These moments help support physical health while breaking up long stretches of sitting.

Outdoor activities offer another opportunity, even in colder weather. Bundling up for a walk, sledding, building a snow fort or exploring a local park can turn winter into an active season.

For families in milder climates, biking, hiking or neighborhood scavenger hunts can provide similar benefits.

Indoor options can be just as effective. Living rooms can become obstacle courses, yoga studios or mini sports arenas with a little creativity. Fitness videos designed for kids, interactive games that encourage movement and even household chores can all contribute to staying active.



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INTENTIONAL SCREEN TIME

Balancing screen time doesn't necessarily mean eliminating it. Instead, families can set reasonable limits and look for ways to make screen use more intentional. For example, alternating between screen-based activities and active play or choosing games that incorporate movement can help maintain a healthier rhythm.

Social connection can encourage activity. Inviting friends or relatives to join in games, outings or group activi-

ties adds an element of fun and motivation. Community resources, such as recreation centers or holiday-themed events, may offer additional opportunities for active play.

DO WHAT YOU WANT TO SEE

Parents and caregivers can support these efforts by modeling active behavior. When adults participate — whether it's joining a game, taking a walk or trying a new activity together — children are more likely to stay engaged.

Recognize the value of flexibility. Not every day will look the same, and that's OK. The goal is not to fill every moment with activity, but to create a balance that supports both movement and rest.

School breaks offer a chance to explore new ways of staying active, ones that feel less like obligation and more like enjoyment. With a little creativity and intention, families can create routines that keep kids moving while still leaving plenty of room for holiday relaxation.

Ensuring All Feel Welcome

Holiday hosting often centers on generosity with acts such as opening your home, sharing food and bringing people together.

With a little planning, that spirit can extend even further, creating gatherings that support a wide range of dietary needs, abilities and comfort levels.

It starts with the invitation. Asking guests in advance about allergies, dietary preferences or accessibility needs can help avoid last-minute stress. A simple note — “Let me know if there’s anything you need to feel comfortable”— signals that everyone is welcome and considered.

PROVIDING SAFE FOOD

Food is often the focal point of holiday events, and offering a variety of options can make a meaningful difference. Including clearly labeled dishes, such as vegetarian, gluten-free or nut-free, helps guests make informed choices without needing to ask. Cross-contamination is an important consideration; using separate serving utensils and preparation areas can help keep foods safe for those with allergies.

At the same time, balance matters. A table that includes both traditional favorites and lighter options allows guests to



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celebrate in ways that feel right for them. Offering water, nonalcoholic beverages and lower-sugar choices alongside more indulgent treats creates an environment where moderation feels natural, not restrictive.

CREATING COMFORTABLE SPACES

Beyond the menu, accessibility plays an important role in a welcoming space. Simple adjustments — such as ensuring clear walkways, providing sturdy seating and making sure key

areas like restrooms are easy to reach — can help guests with mobility challenges feel more at ease. Good lighting, especially in entryways and hallways, adds both safety and comfort.

For guests who may be sensitive to noise or crowds, creating a quieter area can offer a place to recharge. Even a small, calm corner can make a big difference for someone who needs a break from the activity.

OFFERING WARM ENVIRONMENTS

Hosts set the tone. Encour-

aging inclusive conversation and steering away from potentially divisive topics can help keep the atmosphere relaxed. As a host, modeling respectful, welcoming behavior often guides the flow of the gathering.

Flexibility is key. Some guests may stay for hours, while others may only be able to stop by briefly. Allowing people to participate in ways that fit their schedules and energy levels helps reduce pressure and keeps the focus on connection.

Finally, remember that hospitality doesn’t have to mean doing everything yourself. Potluck-style gatherings or shared responsibilities can ease the workload while inviting guests to contribute in meaningful ways.

At its best, holiday hosting is about more than a beautifully set table. It’s about creating a space where people feel seen, comfortable and able to enjoy the moment. With thoughtful choices, hosts can turn gatherings into experiences that nourish both body and spirit.

Finding Health and Meaning

As the holiday season unfolds, many celebrations center on abundance.

Tables filled to the edges, packed schedules and a steady rhythm of gatherings. But across cultures, some of the most meaningful traditions offer a quieter invitation: to celebrate with intention rather than excess.

Many holidays have traditions that embrace rich histories rooted in reflection, connection and purpose. While food and festivity play an important role, these observances also emphasize values that naturally support well-being.

For example, Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, celebrates the triumph of light over darkness. Many families prepare special sweets and meals, but the holiday is equally about renewal, cleaning the home, lighting lamps and focusing on hope and gratitude. Shifting the focus from indulgence to intention can help create a sense of balance.

Similarly, Hanukkah traditions include foods fried in oil, such as latkes and sufganiyot, symbolizing the miracle of the oil. Enjoying these foods can be part of a healthy holiday when paired with mindfulness — savoring favorite dishes, sharing them with loved ones and balancing them with lighter meals throughout the week.

Kwanzaa, a weeklong celebration of African American



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culture and heritage, centers on seven principles including unity, purpose and creativity. Gatherings often include meaningful conversation, storytelling and music, all reminders that connection itself can be the most nourishing part of the season.

Rauhnächte is a German and Celtic tradition celebrated during the 12 days between Christmas and Epiphany. During that time, no one does laundry and they often burn incense and herbs in the house. Another ritual is making 13 wishes. Every night for 12

nights, those who celebrate make a wish and burn them, handing them over to a Higher Power. On the 13th night, the final wish is one that the wisher must make true in the upcoming year.

Others celebrate the Winter Solstice with a candlelight dinner, a quiet time to reflect and rest on the longest day of the year. It is a time to focus on the natural elements of the season and boost one's mental wellbeing.

Health experts increasingly encourage a shift away from all or nothing thinking during the

holidays. Instead of viewing celebrations as a time to abandon routines, they suggest building in small, sustainable habits. That might mean choosing one or two favorite treats rather than sampling everything, staying hydrated between festive beverages, or taking a short walk after meals to support digestion and energy.

Emotional well-being also plays a key role. Intentional celebrations create space to check in with personal needs, whether that means stepping away from a crowded room, setting boundaries around social com-

mitments or simply taking a moment to breathe and reflect.

Another approach is to center gatherings around shared experiences rather than consumption. Lighting candles, exchanging stories, volunteering or creating handmade decorations can bring a deeper sense of fulfillment while reducing pressure to overspend or overindulge.

Ultimately, celebrating without overconsumption is not about restriction. It is about aligning holiday traditions with what feels meaningful and sustainable.

Navigating Family Dynamics

Holiday gatherings often bring together the people who know us best and sometimes challenge us the most.

While the season is filled with opportunities for connection, it can also stir up old tensions, differing expectations and complicated emotions.

Approaching these moments with intention can help protect mental health while preserving what matters most.

One of the most effective tools is setting clear, realistic boundaries. That might mean limiting the length of a visit, declining certain conversations or choosing not to attend every event. Boundaries are not about shutting people out; they are about creating space to show up in a way that feels manageable and respectful to everyone involved.

Manage expectations ahead of time. The idea of a perfect holiday gathering often doesn't match reality, especially in families with long histories. Letting go of that ideal can ease pressure and make room for more authentic, if imperfect, interactions. "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation" from 1989 is a great movie to watch if you struggle with the concept. In the comedy, Clark Griswold tries to create a perfect holiday for his family only to have everything go wrong — while still ending up with an authentic



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Christmas.

Communication plays a key role. If certain topics, such as politics, personal choices or past conflicts, tend to create tension, it's OK to redirect or gently opt out. Simple phrases such as "I'd rather not get into that today" or "Let's focus on enjoying our time together" can help shift the tone without escalating conflict.

Equally important is recognizing personal triggers. Being

aware of what tends to cause stress or frustration allows individuals to prepare coping strategies in advance. This might include stepping outside for fresh air, taking a short walk, or having a supportive friend on standby for a quick check-in.

For some, creating a flexible plan can make gatherings feel less overwhelming. Arriving early to help set up, bringing a trusted companion or schedul-

ing a clear exit time can provide a sense of control. Hosting, too, can be adjusted, keeping events simpler, shorter or more structured to reduce stress.

It's worth remembering that connection doesn't have to mean constant togetherness. Taking breaks during gatherings — whether to help in the kitchen, play with children or simply sit quietly — can offer moments to recharge.

For those navigating grief, es-

trangement or significant life changes, the holidays may feel especially complex. In these cases, it may be helpful to create new traditions or spend time with chosen family such as friends, neighbors or community groups who offer support and understanding.

Ultimately, protecting mental health during the holidays is about balance. It's possible to honor relationships while still honoring personal needs.