



Senior Living FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Healthy for the Holidays

This special season is filled with holy celebrations, children's joy and — very often — overindulgence.

Meals, desserts and drinks beckon us at every gathering of friends, co-workers and family. That's why it's so important for seniors to balance natural cravings with healthy choices. Here's how to embrace the holiday spirit without compromising your longer-term well-being:

MINDFUL MEALS

Holiday meals frequently feature rich, heavy dishes. The best way to navigate these lavish spreads is to employ mindful eating practices. This can involve serving yourself smaller portions, but should also include creating a purposeful combination of lean proteins, whole grains and vegetables to eat. Include a few cherished treats, but be careful not to eat too many of them.

REMAINING ACTIVE

It won't be easy, but try to integrate some physical activity into the usual holiday routine. Make time for a brisk, health-bolstering post-meal walk. Make it a point to dance at festive gatherings — and at home, too. You can transform household tasks such as cleaning or decorating by adding this beneficial movement.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

While the holidays bring us joy, they can also introduce additional stress. That's why it's important for seniors to implement effective stress management techniques. This might involve dedicating time to hobbies or relaxation, practicing mindfulness or simply declining to take part in certain holiday-related events when they might become overwhelming. Keep your

overall wellness front of mind, even during the busiest of seasons.

HEALTH CHECKS

Maintain your regular health check-ups. Adhere to all prescribed medication schedules, monitor your critical health indicators, and seek medical advice when necessary. Don't forget about basic health needs such as adequate sleep and proper hydration.

Sufficient water is a baseline requirement to sustain your health and vitality throughout this festive season.

SAFETY MEASURES

Safety is always a concern for seniors, particularly those with mobility challenges. With smart decision-making and a careful approach, you can fully embrace this special time of year while still safeguarding your health. Be

aware that seasonal decorations may present tripping hazards. Choose activities that match your physical capabilities. For some, that might mean a quiet day crafting decorations with family. For others, it could be attending special holiday plays or concerts.

Use extra caution when navigating wintry conditions, and request assistance when needed.


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Sharing Food Traditions

Meals with family and friends are always the centerpiece of the holiday season.

Gathering with everyone around the table creates loving memories and a rich family tradition through favorite dishes. Take time this holiday season to share cherished recipes and handed-down cooking techniques with your family or friends at a senior center. You'll be transported to the past while creating a loving tribute to generations who came before.

MEALS AND MEMORIES

Your family's traditional holiday dishes boast distinctive flavors and aromas, based on years of experience mixing and matching ingredients, spices, herbs and sauces. Aromas and flavors can transport seniors back to their childhood holidays, acting as a sensory bridge to the past. Cooking can work like a memory machine even before the table is set for the holiday feast.

Many families have recipes going back generations, carefully filed away for their descendants. Digitize them for your family and friends. You'll be creating a lasting connection to your own traditions but also to your personal or community's cultural identity. Each dish showcases subtle variations influenced by your family's approach to cooking, built upon larger forces that



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impact cultural and culinary trends like available ingredients and migration patterns.

PRESERVING HISTORY

This is as much a conversation as it is a cooking demonstration. Tell the story of each dish, how it grew in generational importance, and why it became a part of your

family's holiday tradition. In this way, talking about family recipes and a particular cooking process can spark interest with fellow seniors and younger generations alike. Everyone comes away with a great meal — and a great story.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

People are eating out more

than ever. With the advent of mass franchising, we're also eating at many of the same restaurants nationwide. That makes saving these unique pieces of culinary history even more important. We're risking the loss of many traditional food practices. Handing down recipes and cooking techniques preserves our cultural

diversity while strengthening much-needed historical continuity. Consider creating a family, community or senior center recipe book and organize annual holiday cook-offs. As this conversation grows and others share their own approaches to holiday meals, you might even create some new traditions.

Intentional Holiday Decorations

Your decorations don't have to be a simple store-bought ball, ribbon or bow.

Seek out treasured items from the past or personalize something with photos or drawings and the year it was made. Sometimes even the simple act of decorating for the holidays can enhance our mood, evoke memories and foster deeper emotional connections during this special season.

RETURNING TO FOND MEMORIES

Every holiday has distinctive symbols, from manger scenes and Santa to Hanukkah menorahs. These unforgettable icons have the power to trigger vivid memories for everyone, but especially seniors who get to revisit cherished holiday celebrations from their past. Decorating your home can act as a ritual linking you to your history while creating an uplifting sense of continuity.

EVOKING WARM EMOTIONS

Experts have shown that the emotional and psychological impact of holiday symbols is extensive. Research indicates that familiar things like beloved ornaments, images from yesteryear and traditional decor elicit positive emotions and improve our mood. For seniors, especially those living in assisted living facilities or nursing homes, these decorations



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can transform an otherwise unfamiliar setting into a space filled with celebration and familiarity. They offer both comfort and a sense of home.

MAKING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

In addition to personal enjoyment, holiday decorations can foster social connections among seniors. Take part in

communal decoration activities at home and in the community, including Christmas tree trimming parties or group menorah lightings. This creates valuable opportunities to interact and form bonds. Shared new experiences can help alleviate feelings of isolation, while promoting a sense of belonging amid the season's hustle and bustle.

BRIGHTENING THE SEASON

As the holiday season draws near, chip in with the decorating efforts of friends and family so that communal spaces foster joy, inclusivity and familiarity. You'll be brightening everyone's season - including your own. Physical activity can enhance motor skills, while the creative

process stimulates cognitive function. For those in senior communities, make sure holiday decorations and activities represent the diverse cultural and religious backgrounds of all your neighbors. By respecting and recognizing these individual traditions, the holiday season is transformed into a time for shared understanding and celebration.



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Avoiding Holiday Stress

As we age, prioritizing emotional and mental well-being becomes increasingly important.

Unfortunately, with travel, busy schedules and hectic gatherings, the holidays can become a big stress point. That's where practices like meditation and mindfulness can be of great help. The emphasis is on relaxation and the importance of being present. Beyond alleviating stress, these relaxing techniques can contribute to improved wellness and enhance your overall quality of life. Research indicates that individuals who practice meditation and mindfulness have better cognitive functions, including memory,

attention and problem-solving skills. Here's how to integrate them into your regular holiday routine:

FOCUSING ON TODAY

Holiday nostalgia can sometimes lead down a bad emotional road. We might begin ruminating on past errors or people we've lost along the way. Instead, focus on the present – on this season. Shifting perspective, known as mindfulness, has been demonstrated to lower levels of anxiety and the stress hormone cortisol, creating a more balanced mindset. Regular meditation has also been found to decrease symptoms associated with the same issues. Being present supports emotional health through increased self-awareness, a more positive mindset and better emotional regulation. Studies have

confirmed concrete physiological improvements as well, including reduced blood pressure, improved sleep quality and a stronger immune system. Relaxation techniques can help with physical symptoms associated with chronic stress, including muscle tension and headaches.

GETTING STARTED

To become more mindful, begin by centering attention on your breathing. Find a tranquil location where you can settle comfortably, close your eyes, and direct your focus inward. Inhale deeply through your nose, pause briefly, and then exhale slowly through your mouth. Concentrate on the sensations of your breath while letting go of any distracting thoughts. Gradually shift your focus inward. Relax your

muscles, especially in the neck and shoulder areas. As you release all that physical tension, you're making a closer connection between mind and body. Committing just five minutes a day to these exercises can significantly lower holiday stress levels.

A DAILY ROUTINE

Commit to incorporating mindfulness into your daily activities. As you engage in tasks such as walking, gardening or eating, try to immerse yourself fully in the present moment. Observe the sights, sounds, aromas and textures of your surroundings with your newly heightened awareness. Even the briefest moments in your daily life can transform into opportunities for mindfulness.

How Technology Can Help

There are new ways of connecting if you can't be together this holiday season.

Seniors are increasingly discovering the potential of technology to bridge the divide when time and distance keep them apart from friends and family. Technology is particularly helpful during the holidays. Here's how to learn new skills that foster a sense of togetherness, even in times of physical separation.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

The digital landscape can be daunting for some seniors, since it's filled with complex user interfaces and terminology. But with patience and support, you can easily and effectively navigate those challenges.

Mastering tools such as email, video conferencing and social media makes it easier to communicate and share special moments with loved ones. You'll be strengthening your emotional bonds even in their absence during this special season, and creating new pathways to communication year round.

ACROSS THE MILES

New digital platforms often improve upon the traditional telephone call as we attempt to bridge the distance with friends and family. Email and texting allow us to share



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quick thoughts, and the receiving party can answer at their own convenience. Video calls allow us to see everything during cherished holiday traditions, whether it's grandchildren unwrapping gifts or sharing a New Year's toast.

You'll never miss out on these special moments again, reinforcing a sense of belonging during this festive season.

LEARNING MORE

Still feeling lost? A host of educational initiatives from across the nation are focused on equipping seniors with essential digital skills. With a combination of workshops, personalized tutoring and webinars, these programs enable seniors to navigate the digital landscape with confidence. In addition to enhancing connectivity

during the holidays, technology can provide seniors with opportunities for mental stimulation and engagement. You can search for shared activities like online games, e-books and digital puzzles.

STAYING SAFE

As our world becomes increasingly digital, being able to connect online has become crucial. This holiday

season, take advantage of it to talk to friends and family, discuss cherished memories and create new ones.

While the benefits of technology are substantial, recognize and address the associated safety challenges. If you're new to this world, seek out information that safeguards your personal information and identifies potential scams.

Before Your Holiday Trip

Here's how to prepare for travelers whose families have scattered all over.

Careful pre-planning should go into long holiday trips so that you – and your gifts! – arrive on time and in one piece. You'll need certain documentation before flying, and accessibility issues may have to be worked out beforehand.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Once you have organized and packed essential clothing and presents for your holiday flight, put your personal documents in order and make them readily accessible. A valid government-issued identification is required to board a plane. Depending on your destination, you might require a passport. It's smart to gather any relevant health insurance details and copies of your medical records. For international travel, consider acquiring a separate travel insurance policy, since Medicare and some private insurance plans may not cover services outside the United States.

ACCESSIBILITY CONCERNS

These days, airports, public transportation, cruise lines, and hotels are far more accessible than they used to be, as laws have passed requiring accommodation for those who may need specific equipment or assistance. Communicate any special needs in advance. Inform necessary personnel about any mobility aids or medical devices you plan to bring along. They can provide detailed information on available assistance and help ensure the safe transport of any essential medical equipment.

If you can manage short distances but find navigating between airline terminals to be challenging, airlines are



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required to provide complimentary transportation for seniors, as well. Passengers who use wheelchairs may not be left unattended for longer than 30 minutes. Airlines allow pre-boarding for those who may require extra time. Just inform the gate agent upon your arrival.

FREQUENT TRAVELERS

For frequent travelers, consider enrolling in programs like TSA Pre-Check or Global Entry. They can expedite the security screening process. TSA PreCheck enables U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents and nationals to streamline their security screening by

paying a fee and verifying their identity through the federal government. Visit [tsa.gov](https://www.tsa.gov) to learn more. On the other hand, Global Entry is tailored for those traveling to and from the U.S. from other countries. Clear is a pre-boarding clearance service offered for a fee by certain credit card companies.

Managing Feelings of Loss

The holidays aren't always so joyful for those suffering from longing and sadness.

If you've experienced loss of a loved one, the season can evoke challenging emotions. While others are celebrating, you might be mourning — particularly if these are the first holidays without a friend, family member or spouse. It's important to focus on remembering and honoring them during this time, rather than shying away from your emotions.

GRIEVING DIFFERENTLY

As with grieving during any other time, there is no singular approach for the holidays. Every individual manages grief in their own unique way. Validate whatever emotions you may have. If you're feeling overwhelmed or ashamed, seek more information about grief and expressing your feelings from a family friend, counselor or trusted web source. Draw on past coping mechanisms, while remaining flexible with holiday traditions. Practice self-care while acknowledging mixed emotions, and don't forget to establish boundaries if you're feeling particularly vulnerable.

NEW AND OLD TRADITIONS

Those who have lost a loved one may prefer to continue long-standing traditions while others may want to take a



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break from them, even if it's only on a temporary basis. Either way, engage in activities that resonate personally, treating yourself with kindness during this mourning period. To foster a sense of closeness, prepare their favorite recipes, watch their favorite seasonal movies or listen to their beloved holiday music. You

could commemorate those who've been lost by creating a memorial display for the holidays. This space can showcase photographs and other cherished items that evoke fond memories, including favorite ornaments or decorations.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

There are other tangible

ways to remain connected while keeping a memory present throughout this holiday season. Light candles, plant a tree in memory of the deceased, share memories on social media, or place a treasured keepsake on the tree or among holiday decorations. Participation in remembrance events or religious services

can provide some solace. Many communities and church groups sponsor special gatherings during the holidays to pay tribute to those who have passed. You'll be engaging in a comforting tradition while perhaps making connections with others who are experiencing a similar form of grief.