



## TEN HOLIDAY TIPS

Each year, December brings a month filled with holidays and celebrations complete with a variety of gift-giving traditions. Check out this list of holiday tips to keep you and your family safe and healthy this holiday season.

**1. Buy safe toys.** If you plan to buy toys for the kids in your life, choose age-appropriate toys and look for labels with safety advice. For young children, avoid toys with small parts, toys with sharp edges, and electric toys that can heat up. Always purchase safety gear in addition to sports-related gifts or ride-on toys, such as bicycles or skateboards.

**2. Celebrate on a budget.** The holidays can be expensive, but you don't have to break the bank to celebrate. Take a few minutes to decide how much you can afford to spend on gifts, travel, parties, decorations, and other holiday expenses. Once you've created a spending plan, keep track of your purchases. Shopping online can help you stick to a budget, as you'll avoid the temptation of store displays and may be able to use coupons and promotion codes. Before you buy, look for free shipping offers, check ordering deadlines to ensure that your gifts will arrive on time, and read the return policy.

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## TIPS FOR SAVING ENERGY DURING THE WINTER

In the winter, when many people turn on their heaters and put up holiday lights, gas and electric bills can be much higher than usual. According to the Department of Energy (DOE), a family spends more than \$1,900 a year on electricity bills and other utilities. A big part of those costs comes from wasted energy during those cold months. However, you can save on winter energy costs if you make some changes in certain areas of your home.

### Lighting

Improve the lighting in your home and save energy.

- Replace traditional light bulbs with compact fluorescent light bulbs, which last between 6 and 12 times longer. Remember to turn off any lights that aren't in use.
- Consider using LED lights for holiday decorations. These use 90% less energy than standard lights.

### Thermostats and Heating

Keep your home warm and comfortable.

- Install a programmable thermostat for your home's heating system.
- Keep the doors and windows closed while the heat is on.
- Frequently change the filters in your furnace.
- Set the thermostat on your water heater to 120° Fahrenheit.

### General Tips

Be energy efficient throughout your home.

- Use the exhaust fan in the kitchen and bathrooms only when necessary.
- Repair any water leaks in the bathrooms, kitchen, laundry room, and so on.
- Use power strips to plug in portable heaters, televisions, and cell phone chargers. That way, you can turn off the power switch when the devices are not in use.
- If you're thinking of replacing your appliances, make sure they have an Energy Star logo. Energy Star products are more energy efficient.

### Programs for Low-Income Families

During the winter, the government helps low-income families with their energy bills. The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, also known as LIHEAP, helps families pay some of their heating costs. To see if you qualify for these benefits, contact your local LIHEAP office (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/liheap-state-and-territory-contact-listing>) for more information.

USA.gov Blog. (2013, November 15). Tips for saving energy during the winter. Retrieved August 19, 2014, from <http://blog.usa.gov>



## CHECKUP CHECKLIST

### Things to Do Before Your Next Checkup

Getting checkups is one of many things you can do to help stay healthy and prevent disease and disability. You've made the appointment to see your health care provider. You've reviewed the instructions on how to prepare for certain tests. You've done the usual paperwork. You're done, right? Not quite. Before your next checkup, make sure you do these four things.

#### Review your family health history.

Are there any new conditions or diseases that have occurred in your close relatives since your last visit? If so, let your health care provider know. Family history might influence your risk of developing heart disease, stroke, diabetes, or cancer. Your provider will assess your risk of disease based on your family history and other factors. Your provider may also recommend things you can do to help prevent disease, such as exercising more, changing your diet, or using screening tests to help detect disease early.

#### Find out if you are due for any general screenings or vaccinations.

Have you had the recommended screening tests based on your age, general health, family history, and lifestyle?

Check with your health care provider to see if it's time for any vaccinations, follow-up exams, or tests. For example, it might be time for you to get a Pap test, mammogram, prostate cancer screening, colon cancer screening, sexually transmitted disease screening, blood pressure check, tetanus shot, eye check, or other screening.

#### Write down a list of issues and questions to take with you.

Review any existing health problems and note any changes.

- Have you noticed any body changes, including lumps or skin changes?
- Are you having pain, dizziness, fatigue, problems with urine or stool, or menstrual cycle changes?
- Have your eating habits changed?
- Are you experiencing depression, anxiety, trauma, distress, or sleeping problems?

If so, note when the change began, how it's different from before, and any other observation that you think might be helpful.

Be honest with your provider. If you haven't been taking your medication as directed, exercising as much, or anything else, say so. You may be at risk for certain diseases and conditions because of how you live, work, and play. Your provider develops a plan based partly on what you say you do. Help ensure that you get the best guidance by providing the most up-to-date and accurate information about you.

Be sure to write your questions down beforehand. Once you're in the office or exam room, it can be hard to remember everything you want to know. Leave room between questions to write down your provider's answers.

#### Consider your future.

Are there specific health issues that need addressing concerning your future? Are you thinking about having infertility treatment, losing weight, taking a hazardous job, or quitting smoking? Discuss any issues with your provider so that you can make better decisions regarding your health and safety.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (Modified 2015, April 1). Checkup checklist: Things to do before your next checkup. Retrieved May 31, 2015, from <http://www.cdc.gov>

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- 3. Give the gift of service.** Sometimes the greatest gift you can give to others is service. Reading to a child just 3 hours a week significantly improves his or her reading skills, or if you help out at a local soup kitchen or food bank, you are directly providing meals to hungry individuals.
- 4. Find seasonal employment.** Even in a tough economy, businesses need extra help around the holidays. Seasonal employment can help supplement your income and potentially lead to a permanent position.
- 5. Get through the holiday blues.** The holidays aren't joyous for everyone. This time of year can bring stress and feelings of loneliness. Exercise, focusing on positive relationships, and doing things that you find rewarding can help with depression. Keep in mind that winter depression could be a sign of seasonal affective disorder (SAD), which is caused by the lack of sunlight. Treatment for SAD is much like treatment for other forms of depression but may also involve light therapy.
- 6. Be safe and save money with LED lights.** Electricity bills can grow during the holidays if you decorate with strings of lights. Consider switching to light-emitting diode (LED) holiday lights to save energy and money. In addition to the energy and cost savings, LED lights are much cooler than incandescent bulbs, reducing the risk of fires. Every holiday season, fires claim lives and cost millions in damage. To prevent holiday fires in your home, use nonflammable decorations, do not overload electrical sockets, and avoid the use of lit candles. As you should do year-round, ensure that your smoke alarms are working. If you celebrate Christmas, be sure to regularly water Christmas trees.
- 7. Pay attention to food portions and physical activity.** The holidays are a wonderful time to celebrate with family and friends, but celebrations sometimes involve overindulging in sweet treats and heavy foods. Even if you gain only 1 or 2 pounds during the holidays, these gains can add up over the years. The holidays are probably not the ideal time to try to lose weight, but you can take steps to maintain your weight.



- 8. Pack for hassle-free air travel.** You can get through the airport security line faster by traveling with unwrapped gifts and following the "3-1-1 rule" when carrying on liquids. You may have favorite liquid food items (like cranberry sauce or special dips) that you want to share during the holidays, but it's best to put such items in your checked bag or ship them ahead of time. If you need last-minute information about what you can and can't bring through security, visit the TSA website at <http://www.tsa.gov>.
- 9. Reduce holiday waste.** The holiday season includes many opportunities to reduce waste, recycle, and reuse items. Consider buying rechargeable batteries (and a charger) for electronic gifts to help reduce the amount of harmful materials thrown away. After the holidays, look for ways to recycle your tree instead of sending it to a landfill. If you plan to send greeting cards, consider purchasing ones that are made of recycled paper or sending electronic greetings.
- 10. Keep food safe.** Holiday buffets are convenient ways to entertain a crowd, but leaving food out for long periods of time can invite bacteria that cause food-borne illness. To keep your holiday foods safe, cook them thoroughly; use shallow containers; never leave them sitting out for more than 2 hours; and keep them at the appropriate temperature.

USA.gov. (Updated 2014, September 3). 10 holiday tips. Retrieved September 11, 2014, from <http://www.usa.gov>





WINTER  
2015

## FAMILY CARING PROJECT

Help children find ways to give to others throughout the year. As a family, participate in a project that shows how you care for and share with those who are less fortunate. Here are some ideas from which to choose:

- Have the family drop their pennies or small change in a large jar every day. Then, deliver the savings to a community group.
- Have the family gather gently used clothing, toys, or books to share at a homeless shelter or home for abused families.
- During the holiday season, have the family pick out small gifts to wrap and donate to a local charity.
- Check your local food bank to see what types of items they need. Then, help the children go through the pantry or shop at the grocery to find food to share.
- Buy art supplies, then set aside a time for the family to write cards or create seasonal decorations for a local hospital.
- Volunteer family time at a nursing home; bring in a pet to share, play cards, or put on a family performance in the common room or dining hall.
- “Adopt” a grandparent at a nursing home to visit or a neighbor for whom you can do needed chores.
- Make greeting cards for a veterans’ hospital or other facility.

Helping your children understand the value of sharing with others while they’re young can build a lifetime habit of caring and giving.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (Updated 2013, April 5). Family caring project. Retrieved June 19, 2014, from <http://bblocks.samhsa.gov>

## CAR AND EMERGENCY CHECKLIST

Are you ready for winter driving? Keep these items in an emergency kit in your vehicle:

- Cell phone, portable charger, and extra batteries
- Shovel
- Windshield scraper
- Battery-powered radio with extra batteries
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Water
- Snack food
- Extra hats, coats, and mittens
- Blankets
- Chains or rope
- Tire chains
- Canned compressed air with sealant for emergency tire repair
- Road salt and sand
- Booster cables
- Emergency flares
- Bright colored flag or help signs
- First aid kit
- Tool kit
- Road maps
- Compass
- Waterproof matches and a can to melt snow for water
- Paper towels



Winter weather checklists. <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/beforestorm/supplylists.asp>. Retrieved November 2015.