

HAVE A KID-SAFE HOLIDAY

Take a few precautions so your youngest houseguests will have a safe and happy holiday visit this year

So, it's your turn to host the big family holiday celebration. Your siblings will be there and their children and maybe even their children. It will be quite a party. But before you start worrying about appetizers and entrees, consider the safety of your guests. If small children aren't frequent visitors to your house, you're going to need to prepare for them.

ALL AROUND THE HOUSE

- Put breakables away from guests. You won't want to spend time during the gathering dabbling off the house gathering valuable off

- tables and shelves. Don't consider a beloved object in the middle of the table safe, especially if it's on a runner that hangs tantalizingly over the table edge.
- Potentially dangerous items, such as cleaning products and medicines, need to be stored away in a cabinet kids can't reach. Lock them up if you can for an extra measure of safety.
- Also, stash items such as mouthwash, razors and cosmetics.
- Check your purse. Remove any pill bottles, sharp objects, or loose items small enough for kids to swallow. Kids have a knack for finding their way into bags.
- Cover electrical outlets with plastic

- safety covers. Make sure extension cords are not lying where children can trip over them. Keep appliance cords out of reach so a curious kid doesn't pull the appliance down on his head.
- Turn the temperature of your water heater down to 120 degrees to reduce the risk of scalding. Visitors used to the bathroom equipment in their own homes may have trouble regulating the water temperature in your tub.
- Post emergency numbers by the telephone, including the number for your local poison information center. Keep a bottle of ipecac syrup on hand.
- Block off stairways - top and bottom - with child safety gates. If you don't have any, ask guests with children to bring their own. Or borrow gates from neighbors.
- Finally, get on all fours and tour your house. It might seem silly, but you don't want to ask what lurks at child height. Look for small items such as coins, paper clips, or anything that can fit in a curious little mouth. Don't forget to look under the couch. The children surely will.

- **Gift wrap.** Pick up wrapping scraps immediately after presents are opened. Ribbons and small pieces of paper are dangerous playthings for kids. Some gift wraps and foils even contain lead.
- **Ornaments.** Breakable ornaments pose obvious threats if they're removed or knocked off the tree. But something you may not consider are those ornaments that resemble food or have small parts. Avoid a choking hazard by placing those ornaments at the top of the tree or leaving them in the box.
- **Flames.** Having a fire in the fireplace is a holiday tradition, but it can be dangerous for curious toddlers. Have a sturdy screen that will help keep kids out of and sparks in the fireplace. Keep lit candles out of children's reach.
- **Cooking.** Be sure not to leave the oven door open for a minute or two. If you walk the turkey to the counter, you may not have enough hands, ask for help. Keep the handles of all pots on the cooking pointed away from roaming hands. Hot dishes and sharp knives should be kept away from the edge of countertops. All such kitchen concerns may be avoided if you make that room off-limits to children while meals are being prepared.

- **HOLIDAY HAZARDS**
Decorating your home for the holidays can bring with it a new list of potential hazards. Here are some timely suggestions from the National Safe Kids Campaign.
- The Christmas tree. Curious kids may get more than their bargained for if they grab an unstable tree. Make sure the tree fits snugly and securely in its stand. Also, trim low branches so they can't poke young children in the eyes or give them a handle to pull down. Keep a vacuum handy. Fall-in needles may be eaten or prick a crawling child.
- Inspect old toys you plan to use. Check for small, loose, or broken parts that could be swallowed. Also, look for sharp corners that could cut small hands. Dress-up clothes are full of beads and ties that could choke small children.
- Inspect the kids in preparation or choose that differ from their usual duties. They may enjoy trying appetizers or collecting firewood.
- Schedule special activities for kids only. Rent some videos, launch a cookie-decorating contest, plan to drive down to the local arena.
- Using common sense and these basic guidelines will help ensure your holiday gathering is a safe one.

EXTRA TOUCH OF SAFETY

Other things you can do to make the visit nice - and safer - for children and their parents:

- **Rent a crib.** Your guests will be happy enough packing gifts, diaper bags, and toys, don't make them think about sleeping accommodations, too. And you won't sleep very well worrying the toddler will fall off the makeshift-foot on the couch. Don't use an old crib because it may not meet current safety standards. Also, do not place the crib near a window with blinds or curtains, where a child could become entangled.
- **Set aside a room or area that allows the children to play without worrying about breaking something.**
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BATTLE OF THE BULGE

Follow these sensible, time-proven tips to avoid the holiday weight-gain blues

Taking on a few extra pounds over the holidays never killed anyone. But it might make your shirt gape a bit around the fourth button down. Your best bet: Avoid holiday weight-gain blues rather than torture yourself with crash diets or marathon exercise weekends. Here are some ideas:

- **Park as far** from the mall entrance as possible. You'll avoid the stress of seeing that perfect store while you're trying to speed over from the next aisle. More important, you'll burn calories coming from and going to your car.
- **Take the stairs.** Be honest - how often do you use the elevator for one or two floors when you could be burning fat?
- **Walk to lunch.** Even if you eat at your desk, you can take a 15-minute walk to get there via a trip around the building.
- **Don't go to a party starving.** Eat a healthy snack about an hour before you arrive.

- **Ask at restaurants** that saucers and dressings be served on the side.
- **Split festive entrées** and decadent desserts between two people.
- **Avoid all-you-can-eat buffets** where you might overeat to get your money's worth.
- **Don't hesitate to get a "sugary bag."** That way, you can reduce your portion at the restaurant and have enough for lunch the next day.
- **Instead of planning every family gathering** around food, schedule a fun event. Play an evening's worth of Monopoly, or take a tour of holiday light displays.
- **Avoid food shopping** when you're hungry.
- **Meet in safe places.** Instead of touching base with a friend at the coffee shop or bakery, meet at a neighborhood park or at an art museum.
- **Choose lower-fat versions** of foods such as ice cream, cheese, sour cream, and salad dressing.
- **Reward yourself** occasionally for sticking to your game plan. Treating yourself to a movie reinforces your resolve.

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GET THE STRESS OUT

Control the holiday chaos Don't let it control you

If all you want for Christmas are aspirin and antacid, you're not enjoying yourself! Like you should. Holidays are hotbeds of stress, but you can still maintain control of the chaos. Here are a few suggestions for getting the stress out of the season and the joy back in.

SET PRIORITIES

Decide what makes the holidays special for you and your family. Is it a celebration of your religious faith? Is it a chance to get together with relatives? Or are you just hoping to relax for a couple of days?

You'll get frustrated and exhausted if you try to squeeze too much out of any holiday. By clarifying what you want, you'll make better use of your time and energy.

PLAN AHEAD

Don't wait to shop for food or gifts. As the holiday gets closer, stores get more crowded, and your shopping becomes more frantic. That means you'll probably end up spending more and enjoying it less.

Make up your holiday menu, and buy groceries at least a week in advance. Do as much of the preparation as you can ahead of time, too. Why wait until right before the meal to get that milk tray ready?

When it comes to gift shopping, spread it out over a couple of months rather than doing a dash-and-grab the day before. Make a list of the people you need to buy for, and carry it with you. Keep your eyes open for gift possibilities when you're out for lunch or running errands. Sometimes you'll find the best gifts when you least expect it.

Decide in advance which social obligations are important. Learn when it's time to say enough is enough. It is necessary to cook the world's

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New Year New Year New Year

Spending Watch

Don't let debt break your holiday spirit

The period between the day after Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve is a make-or-buy time for many retailers. Just make sure holiday spending doesn't break you. Consumer advocates offer these reminders:

- **Set a budget** for holiday spending and stick to it. Remember to include new clothes and entertaining expenses in that budget.
- **BeCOME price conscious**, and make shopping lists to avoid impulse buys.
- **Ignore seasonal credit card com-**

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More than any other confection, the candy cane is part of the American Christmas holiday. Cases of white candy, hung as decoration on tree branches, came here with German immigrants.

Given to children three centuries ago as living reenactments of the Nativity scene, the candy cane's shape certainly calls to mind the crooks used by shepherds long ago. The familiar stripes appear to have been added to candy canes in the early 1900s.

Some suggest that traditional colors of white and red symbolize purity and sacrifice, values of the Christmas season.

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