

Ho Ho Ho...Healthy Holiday Hints



Health Matters

By Kerry Sauser

The Thanksgiving turkey has been carved and the leftovers eaten; now the holiday lights are twinkling and the scent of evergreen is in the air. The holiday season is upon us, complete with parties, school programs, kisses under the mistletoe, lavish meals, and holiday shopping. This is a wonderful time, but the extra activity and can be hard on our health. Here are a few hints to keep you going strong right through the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve.

Many people visit more with friends and family at this time of year. We'll be hugging those cute toddlers and getting kisses from Aunt Maude...and will probably be pushing more shopping carts than usual. As much as we love it, in purely medical terms, more person to person contact equals just one thing: more opportunities to receive the gift of a cold or flu. It's never fun to be sick, but it is especially trying during holidays. The following will

help keep you well:

Wash your hands often. Washing hands is the best way to prevent the spread of infection and illness. To be effective, lather up all surfaces of your hands and fingers for the length of time it would take you to sing the entire Happy Birthday Song. Make sure everyone in your household does too, especially children. If no soap is available, you can use an alcohol-based hand disinfectant.

Avoid touching your eyes and nose. They are where germs most commonly enter our bodies.

Regularly clean surfaces that many people touch. We don't normally consider who has touched the doorknob, cabinet handle, computer keyboard, TV remote, or shopping cart handle before us. Wipe them down. Some stores now offer wipes where shoppers pick up their carts.

Boost the whole family's immune system with Vitamin D3, elderberry, plenty of rest and extra fruits and vegetables.

Treat cold and flu at the first sign of symptoms. Most of us can tell when we feel a little "off". That's usually a sign the body is fighting an illness and it's the best time to successfully counteract one. I keep an emergency cold/flu kit on hand so that it's ready the moment I feel cold or flu coming on. The kit includes chewable Echinacea tablets (portable and safe for kids too), as well as a high potency Echinacea li-

quid for its antiviral and antibiotic properties. I also keep a homeopathic liquid that fights viruses in the upper respiratory tract on hand. If you have none of these available, go to your kitchen. Garlic is a wonderful anti-microbial that can be eaten in its natural form to fight bacterial infections and viruses. Honey added to tea with lemon will soothe a sore throat, and it also has strong antibacterial properties.

If you do get sick, stay home-don't make your family, friends and coworkers sick, too. If you are caught out, limit your contact, sneeze into your shoulder, wash your hands often, and get to bed as quickly as possible.

We all know that holiday foods are not always the best from a nutritional standpoint, but I won't be a Scrooge and tell you to only eat carrot sticks. Do use moderation with fatty or sugar laden foods and follow these tips:

Offer fruits, veggies and nuts at your holiday parties. Give your guests (and yourself) the option to eat some healthy choices as well as the holiday treats.

Don't go to a holiday event on empty stomach. This will keep you from over eating due to low blood sugar. Eat snacks that contain a little protein and fiber ahead of time.

Consume Alcohol and rich foods in moderation. If you do overeat, take a digestive enzyme to help your digestive tract handle the added load. Alternate alcoholic drinks with water. Sparkling

water in a wine glass with a few cranberries and a slice of lemon looks and tastes festive, without the downside of a headache the next day.

Limit Sugar and caffeine for the kids. Remember, their bodies are smaller than ours, and that means when a child drinks one soda, it's like an adult drinking 3 or 4. The same goes for cookies and candies. Make sure kids eat something healthy before filling up on the treats. They'll feel better and you'll have the added benefit of improved behavior with fewer tantrums.

Holidays can also be quite stressful. Planning an event for a crowd, traveling with children, and dealing with seasonal financial demands can be challenging. Here's how to offset holiday pressures:

Get enough sleep. Any Santa who's been up assembling bicycles and dollhouses into the wee hours will tell you sleep is vital to an enjoyable holiday. If you're up late for midnight services or up early to cook holiday meals, try to work in a nap or extended bedtime the day before or after.

Pause for some deep breathing. Just a few minutes of deep breathing will lower stress hormones, and bring you to a place of calm. Make it a family moment as you breathe deep while taking turns recounting blessings or holiday memories.

Get in a little exercise. You might not have time to get to the gym, but you can park farther from the door

when shopping, or choose to take the steps instead of the elevator if you are at a mall. Inject exercise into your daily activities if you can't dedicate time for "just exercise".

The holidays give us the opportunity to sing with gusto, laugh, love and give of ourselves. Maximize time spent on the activities that bring you calm and happiness, and don't sweat the details. Sharing a sense of health and well being is a wonderful gift to give those around you.

I wish you all a joyous

holiday season. Until next month...Heal well, be well...naturally!

K.S.

(Dr. Kerry Sauser, ARNP, ND, PhD, practices functional health care at the Natural Health Center in Atlantic. Her offices are located in the Complementary Care Center at the corner of 2nd and Linn Street. The CCC is open to the public and hosts a natural food store, and health care services including, massage, Ortho-Bionomy, digital thermography, reflexology, hypnosis, and acupuncture.)