

National Health Observances

December

World AIDS Month
Safe Toys & Gifts Month

Dec. 1

World AIDS Day

Week of Dec. 1 - 7

National Aplastic Anemia and MDS
Awareness Week

Week of Dec. 5 - 11

National Hand Washing Awareness
Week

January

Cervical Health Awareness Month
National Glaucoma Awareness Month
National Birth Defects Prevention
Month
National Blood Donor Month
Thyroid Awareness Month
National Lose Weight, Feel Great Month

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Start Some Healthful Holiday Traditions

The month of December can produce extra stress, a breakdown in healthy eating habits, even depression. But you and your family can adopt some new traditions that may help relieve the season's stress and make your holidays healthy and happy.

"Each December, millions of Americans find themselves spending more money than they can afford, taking on more responsibilities than they can handle and having less relaxed time with their families than they have at any other time of the year," explains Jo Robinson, co-author of "Unplug the Christmas Machine." "Too many people attempt to celebrate someone else's holidays. They're taking their cues on what the holidays should be from television shows, ads, store displays or their own parents, rather than doing what would be most meaningful to them."

Your physical health

When the holidays become more than you bargained for, your physical health can be compromised because you may put aside healthy habits. And stress can put additional demands on your body. Here are some tips on maintaining your health during the



holiday season:

- Don't do too much. Give yourself some time to relax.
- Share the workload. Let everyone play an active role; make the holidays a family affair so you're not burdened with all the work.
- Establish priorities. You can't do everything; say no to some demands on your time.
- Simplify your life. Be less elaborate this year. Relax your housekeeping and holiday preparations.
- Continue to exercise. Don't let your regular regimen lapse.
- Eat healthy foods and limit your consumption of high-fat holiday treats. Serve healthy fare at your family's holiday party.

Your emotional health

It's easy to become overwrought this time of year, especially if you believe something is lacking in your holiday celebration. Here are some ways to create new holiday traditions that will help level your emotions:

- Ask yourself if you really enjoy all the rituals or whether they have merely become habits. Try adopting less elaborate

traditions of holidays past.

- Don't be afraid to scale down gift giving. You'll probably receive a lot of support.
- If your annual party is too much to handle, postpone it until after the holidays when you have more time to prepare. This also will help alleviate post-holiday letdown by giving you something to look forward to.
- If you are unable to be with your family, get out around people. Plan to be with friends or volunteer to help others who also may be separated from their families.

Happy and healthy kids

Children are especially vulnerable to commercial stimuli during the holiday season. But basically, all



kids really need are realistic expectations

about gifts, an even-paced holiday season and strong, loving family traditions. Here are some ways to make the holidays special for your children:

- Spend more time with your kids. Entertain less and attend fewer parties that exclude children.
- Watch less television and do more activities as a family.
- Include your kids in all preparations. Let your children help you decorate and bake,

even if it means your creations aren't perfect.

- Teach children the meaning of giving. Adopt a needy family and have your youngsters help you prepare a meal for them. Suggest that your children buy a gift for an underprivileged child with their own money. Or ask them to donate one of their own gifts to a less fortunate child.
- Teach your children that gifts don't have to be tangible. Trade intangible gifts with each other -- such as helping with homework, washing the dishes and polishing shoes. Let your children come up with their own ideas of what they can offer.

Teach the Joy of Gift Giving

It doesn't take much teaching for children to understand the "getting" part of giving and receiving. But it's never too early to begin setting a good example for your children, to teach them the joy of giving gifts.

"Role modeling is the best way to learn that giving is a positive concept," says Ellen Hollon, director of child life at Children's Medical Center of Dallas. "Parents can be good role models, for example, by adopting a family in need and shopping for items to give to that family during the holidays," Ms. Hollon says. She recommends including children in the process by allowing them to pick out toys they would like to give to another child.

There are lots of opportunities to help teach the concept of giving during the holidays. For example, children can pass on toys to youngsters who will spend the season inside the hospital. Other local charities typically establish special programs during the season to make it easy for families to help the less fortunate.

Tracy Underwood, a clinical psychologist at Children's, says, however, that parents should not expect young children to fully understand, much less embrace, the concept of selflessness. "It's developmentally appropriate and normal for children to be selfish and to enjoy receiving more than giving," she says. Ms. Underwood recommends making the child part of the gift-buying process by telling him or her that you really need help in buying just the right gift for a friend or family member. "This excitement will establish a foundation of positive feelings associated with giving that will pave the way for heartfelt benevolence in the future."



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