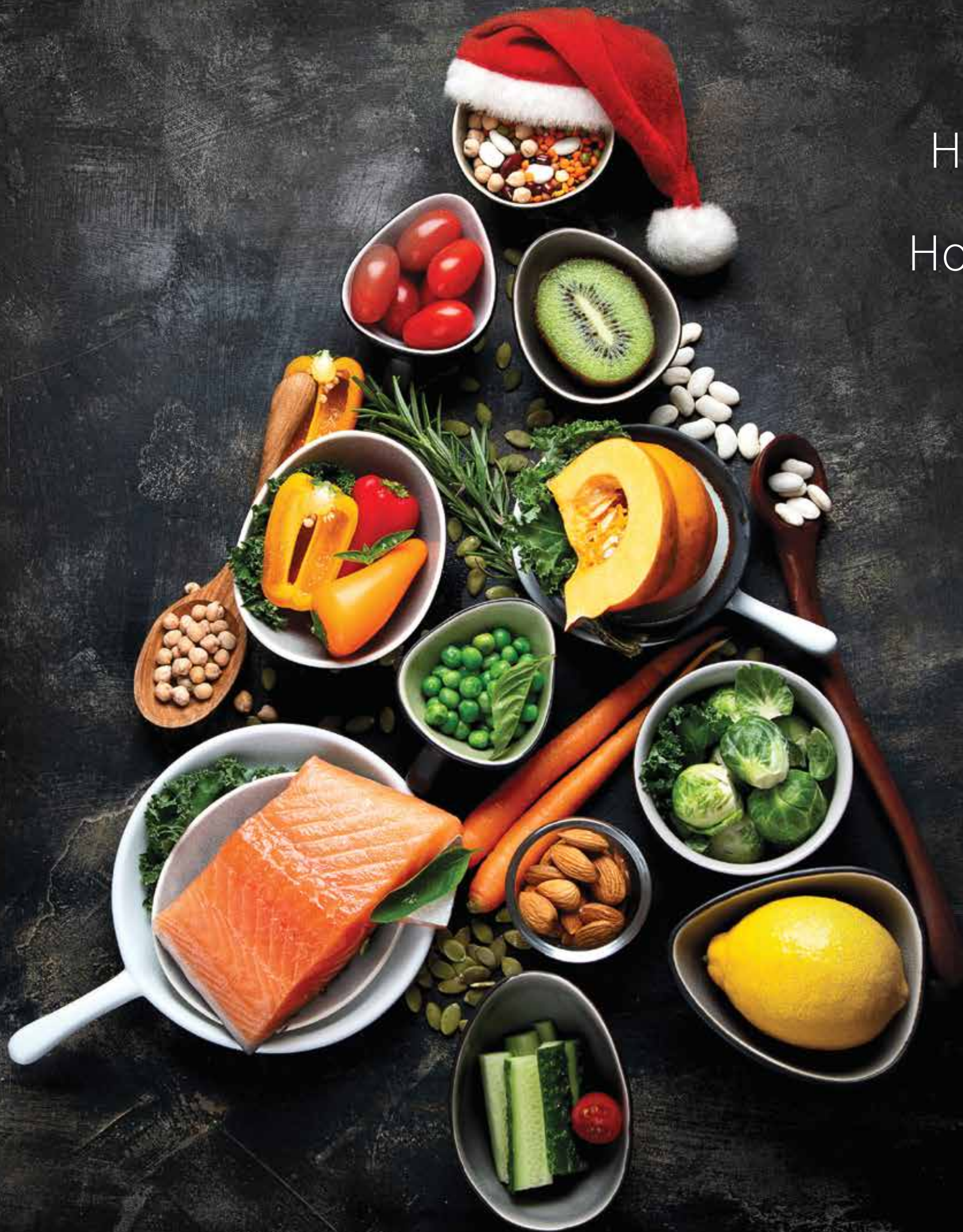


Stay  
Healthy  
for the  
Holidays



# Holly, Jolly Handwashing

In the past three years, we've become more aware than ever of the need to prevent infectious diseases from spreading.

This is especially important during the holidays when you are getting together with relatives, friends and co-workers. If you are traveling, it's easy to pick up a virus at airports, in airplanes, on trains, in taxis or rideshare cars.

One of the simplest — yet highly effective ways — to avoid the flu, cold, COVID or other viruses is to wash your hands often and well. It also helps prevent those nasty gastrointestinal distress episodes.

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Before you turn your nose up at being told how to do something you've done all your life, you might find it fascinating to know that teaching people about handwashing has made a measurable difference in community health.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shares these details on what handwashing education has done:

- Reduce the number of people who get sick with diarrhea by 23-50%.
- Reduce diarrheal illness in people with weakened immune systems by 58%.
- Reduce respiratory illnesses, like colds, in the general population by 15-21%.
- Reduce absenteeism due to



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gastrointestinal illness in schoolchildren by 29-57%.

## WHEN SHOULD YOU WASH YOUR HANDS?

There's never a bad time to wash your hands, but there are some times it is even more important than others. The Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology recommends these times:

- Before eating.
- Before, during and after preparing food.

- After going to the bathroom.
- After coughing, sneezing or caring for someone who is ill.
- After taking out the garbage.
- After petting animals.

## HOW SHOULD YOU WASH YOUR HANDS?

Health care professionals want to make sure you're doing more than just splashing water on your hands. So, they've released plenty of guidelines on how to do it right.

The Florida Health

Department took the CDC recommendations and made these suggestions:

- Wet your hands with clean, running water.
- Turn off the water and apply soap. If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand rub containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers and under your nails.

• Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds. Many people suggest humming the happy birthday song from beginning to end twice. If you'd prefer a more seasonal option, consider humming "Jingle Bells" or "Silent Night."

- Rinse well under clean, running water.
- Dry your hands with a clean towel or just shake them out and air dry them.

Keep these instructions in mind and enjoy a healthier holiday season.

# Avoid Fire and Safety Hazards

It's the time of year when people break out boxes of holiday decorations and spread cheer inside and out. It's also the time of year of rising home fires and accidents.

People fall off ladders, frayed holiday light cords catch fire, and people trip on cords or decorations. Sometimes pets knock over a tree and send glass flying everywhere.

## FIRE SAFETY

The American Red Cross suggests many ways to keep your home safe from holiday fires.

- Candles cause an average of 20 home fires a day in the United States and the highest number of those happen in December. Use battery-operated candles. If you do use open flames, keep them away from anything flammable and out of the reach of pets and children. Don't leave candles unattended.

- Check holiday light cords to make sure they aren't frayed or broken.

- Limit strands of light to no more than three per extension cord.

- Turn off all the holiday lights when you go to bed or leave the house. Consider using a timer.



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- Only use lights designed for outdoor use outside and fasten them securely to your home or trees. If you are using hooks or nails outside, make sure they are insulated.

- Look for fire-resistant labels on artificial trees. Don't put them up near fireplaces, radiators or other sources of heat.

- Don't use electric lights on metallic trees.

- Keep a live tree fresh and watered.

- Don't light the fireplace when you've hung stockings or other decorations on the mantel.

- Test your smoke alarms and practice a home fire escape plan to make sure everyone can get out of the house in less than two minutes.

Ohio Edison, a utility company, has some additional tips to keep your family safe, starting with reading instructions for all decorations.

- Make sure there is a bulb in each socket of a light cord. Get rid of any damaged strands.

- Keep your ladders and outdoor decorations away from power lines.

- Make sure all lights have Underwriters Laboratory (UL) on the tag. A red UL means the lights are safe for both indoors and outdoors. A green UL means they are only safe for indoor use.

- Don't hammer tacks or

nails into the electrical cord. Use clips instead.

- Use heavy-duty extension cords and make sure they are designated for outdoor use if you use them outdoors.

- Plug outdoor lights and decorations into circuits that are protected by ground fault circuit interrupters.

## OTHER HOLIDAY SAFETY TIPS

What else can you do to prevent accidents or holiday mishaps?

Practice good ladder safety. Make sure the ladder is stable, use shoes with good traction, and have a partner who spots you while on the ladder.

If you have pets or children — or plan to be hosting either — use unbreakable ornaments rather than the fragile, glass or ceramic kind.

Don't put out fake food, especially candies or fruits that pets or children might be tempted to eat. Be careful where you put those beautiful, festive poinsettias. They are poisonous if eaten. So are mistletoe berries, holly berry and Jerusalem cherry.

Some old tinsel has lead; either replace it or wear gloves when handling it. Some light strands also contain lead in the bulb sockets and wire coating, so don't let children put them in their mouth.

After everyone has opened their presents, remove all bags, paper, ribbons, bows, and wrapping paper from the tree and fireplace areas to avoid suffocation, choking and fire hazards.

# Avoiding the Seasonal Flu

There's a reason Dec. 6-12 is designated National Influenza Vaccination Week. With all the holidays and people getting together, respiratory illnesses — seasonal flu or COVID-19 — tend to rise.

When you get a flu vaccine, you stay healthy and avoid passing the flu to others, especially your older or younger relatives. Once you've had the flu vaccine, it takes about two weeks to build up antibodies, so you don't want to wait until just before your holiday gatherings.

## WHAT IS THE FLU?

The flu is a respiratory illness caused by viruses in the nose, throat and lungs that is highly contagious. There are two main types, A and B, that are responsible for seasonal flu epidemics every year.

## WHO SHOULD GET THE FLU VACCINE?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that everyone who is six months and older get a flu vaccine every year. It is especially important for children 5 and under; pregnant women; people 65 and older; people with medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes or lung diseases; and people who live with



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or care for infants and people older than 65. You should not get the flu vaccine without talking to your doctor first, according to the University of California San Francisco, if you have had a bad reaction in the

past, are allergic to chicken eggs or have a fever on the day you are scheduled to get your vaccine. There are vaccines without eggs; you just need to talk to your doctor to find the right kind.

## WHY GET THE FLU VACCINE?

The flu vaccine prevents illnesses, medical visits, hospitalizations and death, according to the CDC.

The flu vaccine has also

been associated with lower rates of cardiac events for people who have heart disease, the CDC says, and pregnant women who get vaccinated are protected from flu illnesses and their baby is protected for several months after birth.

It is important to get a vaccine every year because the flu viruses are constantly changing. The vaccines get updated every year. Also, protection from a flu vaccine declines over time.

## ARE THERE SIDE EFFECTS?

There can be, but first know that the flu vaccine cannot cause flu. Flu shots are made with inactivated (or dead) flu vaccine viruses that are not infectious or from proteins from a flu virus. Nasal spray vaccines are made with weakened live flu viruses that cannot, according to the CDC, cause flu illness.

The weakened flu virus cannot reproduce in the lungs where there are warmer temperatures.

Side effects from a flu shot can include swelling or redness where the shot was given, low-grade headaches, fever, muscle aches, nausea or fatigue. Nasal sprays can cause runny noses, wheezing, headaches, low-grade fevers, a sore throat or coughs. In some children, it can cause vomiting or muscle aches.

Give yourself and everyone who encounters you this season the gift of good health by getting your flu vaccine.

# Walk off Your Holiday Meals

The feast is over and the dishes are cleared. You're filled with ham and pie, green bean casserole and mincemeat tarts. It may be tempting to claim that family recliner and slip off into a coma until all the food digests.

Recent studies suggest a healthier alternative: Go for a relaxing walk. Take with you those relatives you never see and talk while you walk so you're not tempted to overdo it. Exercising too hard right after eating can cause heartburn and diarrhea, but there are many benefits to taking a moderate to relaxing walk.



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## BENEFITS OF WALKING AFTER YOU EAT

What have scientists been saying about walking after a meal? Here are just a few benefits:

- Improve digestion. Take a 15-minute slow walk after that holiday meal. It will help move your food from your stomach to your intestine and you'll digest your food better according to researchers published in the Journal of Gastrointestinal and Liver Diseases.
- Regulate your blood sugar. The American Diabetes Association says that 10 minutes of walking after dinner

can improve your glucose levels and help prevent a glucose spike and sugar crash.

- Lose weight. The International Journal of General Medicine advised that walking just after a meal can help a person lose weight more effectively than if they wait an hour before walking.
- Reduce gas. Your fellow party guests may thank you, according to a study published in 2020 in the journal PLOS

One. They found a direct relationship between how much a person walked and how much that person had irritable bowel syndrome symptoms.

- Feel better. The Mayo Clinic shares that an after-dinner stroll can release serotonin, a hormone that makes a person feel good, improves memory and promotes good sleep.
- Boost blood flow. Walking helps you get the blood pump-

ing through the body. This helps your muscles, your circulation and even your bones and organs.

## GET INTO A STRIDE

You've probably been walking all your life, but not all walks are equal. In order to get the most fitness and health benefits from a walk, you need good posture and purposeful movement. What does that look like? The Mayo Clinic

paints this picture:

- Keep your head up and looking forward.
- Relax your neck, shoulders and back; don't have them stiff.
- Swing your arms freely with a slight bend in your elbows.
- Keep your back straight and slightly tighten your stomach muscles.
- Walk smoothly, rolling from heel to toe.

# A Season for Good Sleep

Are you craving a long winter's nap? It can be hard to get good sleep around the holidays, but it is essential to staying healthy and enjoying all the season has to offer.

Different ages need different amounts of sleep, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Newborns need 14-17 hours of sleep. School age children need nine-12 hours of sleep every 24 hours, teens need eight-10 hours. Adults need seven or more hours per night.

Not getting enough sleep can cause health problems. Health problems associated with getting less than seven hours sleep include heart attack, coronary health disease, stroke, asthma, COPD, cancer, arthritis, depression, chronic kidney disease and diabetes.

## DEVELOP HEALTHY SLEEP HABITS

How can you make sure you get enough sleep. The CDC suggests a couple of habits that might improve your sleep hygiene.

- Be consistent. Go to sleep at the same time and wake up at the same time, even on weekends.
- Prepare your sleep space. Make sure the place where you sleep is quiet, dark, relaxing and at a comfortable tempera-



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ture (slightly cooler is better).

- Unplug yourself. Remove all electronic devices from your sleeping area including televisions, computers and smart phones.

- Watch what you eat and drink. Avoid large meals, alcohol and caffeine before bedtime.

- Exercise. The more you move during the day, the more easily you are likely to sleep at night.

The Sleep Foundation adds more tips.

- Take baby steps. Making gradual changes helps you

adjust and settle into a new sleep schedule.

- Avoid the nap temptation. If you must nap, keep it short and take it early in the afternoon.

- Don't force it. If you find yourself tossing and turning and can't fall asleep after 20 minutes, get up and stretch, read or do something else calming in low light before trying to sleep again.

- Optimize your bedroom. Make sure you have the right mattress and pillow for you. Block out light or use an eye mask. Drown out noise with

ear plugs or use a white noise machine or fan. Engage in some aromatherapy using such scents as lavender.

## DIAGNOSING SLEEP DISORDERS

What if none of that helps? You might have a sleep disorder. Common sleep disorders include insomnia, narcolepsy, restless leg syndrome or sleep apnea. If you can't sleep, the CDC recommends keeping a sleep diary for 10 days and then taking it in to your family doctor.

There are templates for

sleep diaries online, but the CDC recommends recording when you go to bed, when you wake up, what naps you take, how much exercise you get, and recording any alcohol, caffeinated beverages or medications you are taking.

There are also sleep apps that help you track all of the above and can even monitor how much sleep you're getting and what sort of quality sleep you're getting.

So bundle up in those matching PJs and drift off to dream of sugar plums and nut-crackers.

# Relax at Your Local Spa

Christmas is supposed to be a time of peace on earth, good will toward all, but with the stress of getting ready, it can be hard to tap into your inner Zen.

Unwrap the gift of fitness, pampering and peace of mind. Head to your local spa and sign up for the exact treatment that you need.

## SELECTING A SPA

Not sure how to choose a spa? The International Spa Association encourages you to do a little homework, “Decide why you want to take a spa vacation or have a spa experience, what programs and services interest you, what type of setting you would like and how much you can afford.”

They recommend selecting a spa based on what you most want to work on. Depending on the spa, you can work on your goals for:

- Fitness.
- Stress management.
- Peace of mind.
- Pampering and pleasure.
- Health and wellness.
- Cosmetics.

Once you know what you are looking for, you can start searching online for spas near you. Sites like Spa & Beauty Today provide spa profiles and diaries sharing spa experienc-



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es in many different states. SpaFinder has guides to help you have the experience you want.

## CHOOSING A SPA SERVICE

Perusing a spa menu can be an exciting experience. Some spa services include:

**Massages.** Do you want a massage that helps you achieve nirvana or one that works on specific muscle needs that you have? Many spas offer such add-ons as hot rocks, bamboo sticks or CBE oils. Ask about types of mas-

sages including shiatsu, Swedish, Thai, deep tissue or reflexology.

**Facials.** You can get your holiday glow on with a facial focusing on skin care, revitalization and relaxation. Some spas offer medical-grade treatments such as laser treatments, Botox or dermabrasion.

**Body treatments.** Why limit the pleasures of exfoliation to just your face when you can get an entire body treatment that will leave your skin glowing and your body tranquil. Look for a spa's signature treatments which might be

combined with foot or scalp massages.

**Fitness and wellness classes.** Whether you are looking for a Pilates class, meditation or planking, many spas focus on fitness and offer several work-out options. You can purchase a membership at some spas and achieve your fitness and wellness goals year-round.

**Nail treatments.** Perhaps you want a festive look for your fingernails this holiday season or you've been on your feet so much that you need someone to massage and pamper them back to health.

**Water treatments.** Spas have their origin in water. It's why some spas offer communal baths of many temperatures or such private treatments as Vichy showers. Some places even offer beer and wine baths.

**Halotherapy.** Salt spas focus on the health benefits of salt. You can float in a salt tank, breathe deeply in a salt cave or private salt bed.

**Other.** Some spas offer such treatments as infrared saunas and steam rooms, cryotherapy, energy work, aromatherapy and even nap rooms.

# Hydrated for the Holidays

In a season where you may be worried about how many sugar cookies you can eat or how to work off that pumpkin pie, it's easy to forget one of the most basic nutrition needs — staying hydrated.

Yet, more than ever around this time of year, your body needs water.

## WHY WATER?

You hear it all the time: Drink eight glasses of water. But why? Water supports healthy organs, alleviates constipation, carries nutrients and oxygen to the blood cells, regulates body temperature, keeps joints lubricated, maintains energy levels and helps to flush out waste.

That's a lot of work for something as simple as water.

Other ways to stay hydrated include drinking low-calorie drinks such as coffee, tea, sparkling water, seltzers or flavored water.

Amy Jamieson-Petonic, a registered dietitian, told WebMD that drinking 20 ounces of water 20 minutes before each meal can not only keep you hydrated, but reduce cravings and calories when you eat.

## TIPS FOR DRINKING MORE WATER

The Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention has some suggestions on how you can stay hydrated and increase your water intake.

- Choose a water bottle that works for you and keep it with you, refilling it throughout the day.
- Freeze some freezer-safe water bottles. This allows you to have ice-cold water throughout the day.
- Swap out a sugary drink for water.
- When eating out, order

water. Not only will you stay hydrated, you'll save money.

- Serve water during meals.
- Add a wedge of lime or lemon to your water so that it tastes better and you want to drink more.

## ARE YOU GETTING ENOUGH WATER?

For some people, keeping count of how many ounces drunk each day is helpful. Others seek out mindful ways that don't involve tracking

everything.

The Penn State Extension education specialists say you need eight-12 cups of water a day.

If you don't like to count, they recommend other ways to track your water intake:

- If you're thirsty, drink more water.
- If you're exercising or engaging in a lot of physical activity, drink more.
- If you are in extreme temperatures — either hot or cold

— drink more.

• Pay attention to the color of your urine. It should be very pale or colorless and odorless (except for the first time urinating after you wake up).

• If you have dry mouth, fatigue, constipation or decreased appetite, it might be because you are dehydrated. Even more ever symptoms include dizziness, confusion, lower blood pressure and elevated temperature.



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