

10 holiday tips

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, 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. Get additional toy safety tips from the Consumer Product Safety Commission website.



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.

Give the Gift of Service

Sometimes the greatest gift you can give to others is service. Studies show that reading to a child just three hours a week significantly improves his or her reading skills. If you help out at a local soup kitchen or food bank, you are directly providing meals to hungry individuals. Visit Serve.gov to find volunteer opportunities in your area or create your own and recruit others.



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. If you need to update your resume, get resume and interview tips on CareerOneStop.org. Visit USA.gov for online tools and resources to help with your job search.

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. Visit the National Institute of Mental Health for tips on how to help yourself if you're depressed. 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 other forms of depression, but may also involve light therapy.





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 LED (light-emitting diode) holiday lights to save energy and money. In addition to the 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; regularly water live Christmas trees; and avoid the use of lit candles. As you should do year-round, ensure that your smoke alarms are working.

Pay Attention to Food Portions and Physical Activity

The holidays are a wonderful time to celebrate with family and friends, but celebrations sometimes involve over-indulging in sweet treats and heavy foods. Even if you only gain one or two 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.

Visit ChooseMyPlate.gov for tips on how to enjoy your food but eat less of it, and how to make physical activity a regular part of your day.



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 and gravy) that you want to enjoy during the holidays, but it's best to put them in your checked bag or ship them ahead of time. If you're at the airport and need last-minute information about what you can and can't bring through security, use the MyTSA app or mobile website. Visit TSA.gov to learn more about flying with food or gifts.

Reduce Holiday Waste

The holiday season includes many opportunities to reduce waste, recycle, and reuse items. Did you know that about 40 percent of all battery sales occur during the holiday season? 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. Visit EPA.gov for more ideas on how to reduce waste, save money, and help the environment.



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 foodborne illness. To keep your holiday foods safe, cook them thoroughly, use shallow containers, never leave them sitting out for more than two hours, and keep them at the appropriate temperature. Get more food safety tips from the Food Safety and Inspection Service.

For more information go to www.usa.gov/holidays