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Health

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10 ways to slow down this holiday season

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The turkey has been baked. The last leftover has been repurposed. The countdown to [Christmas](#) is officially on. But since when does the countdown to Christmas mean tallying days of dietary ruin, stress overload and over-stretched nerves?

What happened to making the season bright?

Here are 10 ways to keep your holidays healthy and happy:

1. Give. Researchers at Johns Hopkins Center on Aging and [Health](#) found that older adults who volunteered in troubled urban schools experienced improvements physically and mentally.

2. Laugh regularly. Holiday stress labors to leave us thin on laughs, but doing it more could be good for you. A team of doctors at the University of Maryland School of Medicine have linked laughter to the healthy blood vessel function.

3. Shop. Walking the mall while [gift shopping](#) or taking the stairs instead of the escalator are a few ways the American Dietetic Association recommend for sneaking in some physical activity during the holiday months. Experts recommend at least 30 minutes of physical activity daily.

4. Establish a family tradition. It's good for your health, according to researchers at Syracuse University. The report culls from 50 year's worth of research and suggests that family routines and rituals offer stability during times of stress and transition. The study was published in the American Psychological Association's Journal of Family Psychology in 2002.

5. Lose the holiday five. Ever hear the story about how the adults gain 5 pounds between Thanksgiving and New Year's? It's a myth. Researchers for the National Institutes of Health found that adults gain a little less than a pound during the holidays. But before you jump for joy, the study suggests this leads to gradual weight gain because people don't shed the extra weight during the spring and summer. The results were published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2000.

6. Walk. Brisk walking for 30 to 45 minutes a day increases the number of immune system cells that circulate in the body, according researchers at Appalachian State University. The study was published in the November 2010 issue of the British Journal of [Sports](#) Medicine.

7. Enjoy the outdoors. You could burn 240 calories by sledding, ice skating or skiing for 30 minutes, according to the National Institutes of Health.

8. Lighten up. Several studies have linked optimism to good health - it is the holidays, right? The time for spreading good cheer?



Photo illustration | Make your season bright by slowing down.

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9. Eat slowly. Nutritionists say it takes between 10 and 15 minutes for your brain to get the message that you're full.

10. Sleep. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention associates insufficient sleep to chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. The National Sleep Foundation recommends adults get 7 to 9 hours of sleep.

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