Celebrate Your Family

The holiday season is the traditional time to bring our families together and give thanks for our blessings. Each family has its own way of celebrating holidays and special occasions. These differences are what make each family unique.

Set aside time this season to share some memories or experiences that make your holidays special.

Ask family members what their favorite family tradition is or what their most memorable holiday was.

Traditions are family keepsakes that live in your heart. These are memories you can help create for yourself, your children and across generations, so celebrate and happy holidays from Cornell Cooperative Extension of Herkimer County.
ANSWER CORNER: NEW HOME FOOD SAFETY TRADITIONS

Reckless Thawing

Old Habit: More than one out of four Americans admit to thawing frozen turkey or other main meat dish on the kitchen counter, in the oven, or even under hot water in the kitchen sink.

New Tradition: To prevent the spread of harmful bacteria, frozen meats should be thawed and marinated, for that matter - in a refrigerator set below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Or, if pressed for time, you can thaw a wrapped frozen turkey (breast side down) in a sink filled with cold tap water, making sure to change the water every 30 minutes.

Holding Out on Hot Stuff

Old Habit: When preparing a cooked dish that needs to chill (for storage or serving purposes), nearly four out of five home cooks think it’s necessary to wait until foods cool before putting them in the refrigerator.

New Tradition: Waiting can give bacteria a chance to grow. To ensure the freshness and safety of your freshly cooked foods, place them promptly in the refrigerator after cooking… no need to wait.

Covered Dish Delivery

Old Habit: Three out of five holiday revelers typically travel for at least one hour with their homemade holiday dish to a relative or friend’s home.

New Tradition: To eliminate harmful bacteria, bring leftover gravy to a boil on the stove before serving it a second or even third time around.

STRETCHING DOLLARS FOR HOLIDAY PARTIES

It may seem expensive to have a party at your home. However, there are ways to cut costs and have fun.

1. Keep is simple. Cook only 1 or 2 types of meat. A roasted turkey can be very festive.
2. Serve vegetables. Use some lower cost vegetables such as potatoes, cabbage and carrots. Make mashed potatoes, coleslaw or cooked carrots. Serve raw carrots and dip.
3. Buy or make a special bread. Try corn bread, pumpkin bread, cranberry bread, or banana bread.
4. Serve only one dessert. Desserts can be expensive to make. Serve small servings - cut pies into eight slices, cut cakes into smaller pieces. It’s better to have a small piece of a great tasting dessert.
5. Let your guests bring a dish to pass. They may have a special dish that they like to make. They may have found a new recipe over the past year that they would like to share.

Source: SmartFood November 2007, as printed in Connecting Lewis County, Nov/Dec 2007
Save the Dates for “Connecting with Kids”:

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Herkimer, Madison and Oneida Counties presents all-day Connecting With Kids events:

“From Stars to Fibers”

Join several professionals from Cornell University to learn about some very interesting connections to science with a hands-on workshop. Choose from “Things That Fly,” “Fabrications,” “Moon Mission”, “Race to the Planets” and more. It will be a daylong program. The workshop is free and lunch can be purchased for $10.00 per person. Call us for more information on this great opportunity!!

When: January 22, 2009
Where: St. Paul’s United Methodist Church, Oneida
For more information or to register: Call 315.866.7920

Watch upcoming newsletters for complete details of the following Connecting with Kids workshops:

Topic: Conflict Resolution
When: March
Where: Herkimer County

Topic: Economics
When: May
Where: Oneida County

HOLIDAY BOOK TREE

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Herkimer County will be collecting books again this holiday season for needy children throughout the area. These books will be donated to the Even Start Program, a family literacy program which supports families by providing resources to upgrade basic skills and learn ways of being their child’s first teacher. New or “gently-used” books for young children are requested.

If you have any books that you would be willing to donate, please drop them off at the Cornell Cooperative Extension office at 5657 State Route 5 in East Herkimer during business hours, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday. If needed, other times can be arranged. Please call Cornell Cooperative Extension of Herkimer County at 315.866.7920 for more information.

NEED HELP WITH FOOD PREPARATION QUESTIONS?

USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline:
1-800-535-4555
http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Safety_Education/

Home Baking Association
www.homebaking.org
Stuffing (or dressing) is a savory mixture of foods used to accompany fish, poultry, meat, and vegetables. It can help flavor the food and make it go further. Bread, rice, and cornbread can be used as a base for stuffing and can be seasoned with spices, herbs, and chopped vegetables. Eggs and/or broth are put in if a moist stuffing is desired.

For optimum safety, stuffing a turkey is not recommended. For more even cooking, it is recommended you cook your stuffing outside the bird in a casserole. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the stuffing. The stuffing must reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F.

If you choose to stuff your turkey, the ingredients can be prepared ahead of time; however, keep wet and dry ingredients separate. Chill all of the wet ingredients (butter/margarine, cooked celery and onions, broth, etc.). Mix wet and dry ingredients just before filling the turkey cavities. Fill the cavities loosely. Cook the turkey immediately. Use a food thermometer to make sure the center of the stuffing reaches a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F.

Traditional stuffing recipes can often be high in fat, sodium, and calories depending on the ingredients used.

Here’s a different recipe that contains fewer calories, less fat, less sodium and more fiber than many traditional recipes.

**Apple Rice Stuffing**

3 cups diced apples  
3 cups diced onions  
3 cups diced celery  
1 Tablespoon canola oil  
4 cups stuffing mix made without fat  
3 cups cooked brown rice (1 cup rice plus 2 cups water cooked for 30 minutes in the microwave)  
1 cup low-sodium broth

Sauté the apples, onions and celery in the oil. When soft (about 5 minutes), add the prepared stuffing, rice and broth. Combine well and place in covered casserole or baking dish. Bake for 45 minutes at 350°F.

Yield: 16 servings; serving size: 1/2 cup (165 calories, 5 grams fat, 0 grams trans fat, 3.4 grams fiber, 316 mg sodium)

Recipe from Communicating Food for Health, October 2007

Here’s a more traditional recipe:

**Savory and Sweet Stuffing**

4 Tablespoons butter or margarine  
1 large onion chopped  
2 ribs celery chopped  
2 large carrots peeled and grated  
1 package (10 oz.) herb-seasoned cubed bread stuffing mix  
2 corn muffins (3-1/2 oz each) crumbled  
1/4 cup chopped parsley  
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme  
1/2 teaspoon ground sage  
1-14½ oz can chicken broth

In a large skillet, melt butter over medium high heat. Add onion and celery. Cook 6 minutes stirring occasionally. Add carrots and cook one minute more. Transfer to a bowl. Add stuffing mix, crumbled corn muffins, parsley, thyme, and sage to vegetables. Add broth and mix. Place in a lightly oiled baking dish. Bake 50 - 60 minutes at 325°F.

Recipe can be made ahead and frozen before baking. Cover well and freeze. Thaw overnight in refrigerator. Bake 1 hour at 325°F.

Yield: 12 servings; serving size: 1/2 cup (200 calories, 6 grams fat, 0 grams trans fat, 3 grams fiber, 530 mg sodium)
EATING FRACTIONS

Chronological history of pizza:

- **Post Columbus** - Tomatoes were brought back to Europe from the New World. Originally they were thought to be poisonous, but later became accepted and added to pizza.
- **16th century** - Maria Carolina, the Queen of Naples convinced her husband, King Ferdinand IV to allow the peasant dish pizza to be made in the royal oven.
- **1889** - Raffaele Esposito, the most famous PIZZAIOLO (pizza chef) created a pie for Queen Margherita - tomato, basil and cheese, (to resemble the Italian flag) which remains the basis for American pizza.
- **1905** - 1st US Pizzeria opens in New York City at 53 1/2 Spring Street
- **1945** - Soldiers returning from WWII brought with them a taste for certain foods - pizza was at the top of their list.

Eating Fractions by Bruce McMillan is a story about a tasty meal shared by two youngsters and their dog. It's also an introduction to the mathematical concept of fractions. It shows fractions as parts of a whole. Using the simplest fractional units, this book illustrates subtractive fractions.

While young readers enjoy the activities of the story & characters, they will be challenged to develop and use mathematical skills - comparing, seeing relationships, matching, logic and identifying fractional parts.

An extension of fractional thinking can be made by cooking the recipes included. Your children can learn additive fractions as they measure the ingredients of the recipes.

Adults and children cannot only cook up a math lesson together, they can eat it too!

Shared by: Rebecca Benson, Even Start Program
10 TIPS FOR SMART HOLIDAY SHOPPING ONLINE

Experts are predicting that consumers will spend more online this holiday season than ever. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation’s consumer protection agency, and the National Cyber Security Alliance (NCSA), a non-profit organization devoted to cyber security education and awareness, want you to know that scammers follow the money and will be online this holiday season, too. To reduce the risk of a rip-off — and to protect your personal information and your computer from identity thieves and hackers — the FTC and NCSA offer these tips for safer and smarter online shopping this holiday season:

1. **Check out the seller.** If you're thinking about shopping on a site with which you're not familiar, do some independent research before you buy.
   - If it's your first time on an unfamiliar site, call the seller's phone number, so you know you can reach them if you need to. If you can't find a working phone number, take your business elsewhere.
   - Type the site's name into a search engine: If you find unfavorable reviews posted, you may be better off doing business with a different seller.
   - Read the site's privacy policy to learn how it uses and shares your personal information.
   - Consider using a software toolbar that rates websites and warns you if a site has gotten unfavorable reports from experts and other Internet users. Some reputable companies provide free tools that may alert you if a website is a known phishing site or is used to distribute spyware.

2. **Read return policies.** Despite your best intentions, some gifts may need to be returned or exchanged. Before you buy, read the return policy. Some retailers give customers extra time so gifts can be returned or exchanged after the holidays; others give purchasers as little as a week — if they accept returns at all. A number of retailers offer shorter return windows for certain products and some charge "restocking" fees. Find out who covers the shipping cost — the customer or the merchant — on a return or exchange, and if your online purchase can be returned to a brick-and-mortar store.

3. **Know what you're getting.** Read the seller's product description closely. Name-brand items at greatly reduced prices could be counterfeit.

4. **Don't fall for a false email or pop-up.** Legitimate companies don't send unsolicited email messages asking for your password or login name, or your financial information. But scammers do. In fact, crooks often send emails that look just like they're from legitimate companies — but direct you to click on a link, where they ask for your personal information. Delete these emails. They're an attempt to get your information and to facilitate identity theft or other crimes. In addition, just clicking a link in a fraudulent email could install spyware on your computer.

5. **Look for signs a site is safe.** When you're ready to buy something from a seller you trust, look for signs that the site is secure — such as a closed padlock on the browser's status bar — before you enter your personal and financial information. When you're asked to provide payment information, the beginning of the website's URL address should change from http to https, indicating that the purchase is encrypted or secured.

6. **Secure your computer.** At a minimum, your computer should have anti-virus and anti-spyware software, and a firewall. Security software must be updated regularly to help protect against the latest threats. Set your security software and operating system (like Windows or Apple's OS) to update automatically. Visit OnGuardOnline.gov and staysafeonline.org to learn more about security software, firewalls, and other ways to secure your computer.

(Continued on page 7)
7. **Consider how you'll pay.** Credit cards generally are a safe option because they allow buyers to seek a credit from the issuer if the product isn't delivered or isn't what was ordered. Also, if your credit card number is stolen, you generally won't be liable for more than $50 in charges. Don't send cash or use a money-wiring service because you'll have no recourse if something goes wrong.

8. **Know the full price, and check out incentives.** If you're looking for the best deal, compare total costs, including shipping and handling. The holiday season is prime time for online retailers, and many are offering incentives like free shipping. But some "free" shipping deals may come with strings attached, such as requirements to spend a minimum amount or buy certain products. Consider whether one company offers a more generous return policy. If you use a price comparison site to find a bargain, enter the product's model number, and be as specific as you can about its features.

9. **Keep a paper trail.** Print and save records of your online transactions, including the product description and price, the online receipt, and copies of any email you exchange with the seller. Read your credit card statements as soon as you get them to make sure there aren't any unauthorized charges.

10. **Turn your computer off when you're finished shopping.** Many people leave their computers running 24/7, the dream scenario for scammers who want to install malicious software on your machine and then control it remotely to commit cyber crime. To be extra safe, switch off your computer when you are not using it.

Source: OnGuardOnline.gov

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**YOU MAY BE VULNERABLE TO IDENTITY THEFT**

Distracted holiday shoppers are particularly vulnerable to identity theft. The hustle and bustle of the holidays creates the perfect environment for thieves bent on stealing your credit cards or other financial information. Shoppers are tired, stores are crowded and it’s easy to become less guarded about personal information such as credit cards, personal checks, drivers licenses and social security numbers.

Identity thieves take personal information and use it to impersonate a victim, stealing from bank accounts, establishing phony insurance policies, opening unauthorized credit cards or obtaining unauthorized bank loans.

Use of stolen credit card numbers is among the most common forms of identity theft, but some schemes use electronic means, including online scams like "phishing," in which thieves use email inquiries purporting to be from financial or other online organizations, to obtain sensitive account information. Others might use more old-fashioned methods, such as "dumpster diving" - rooting around in people’s garbage to collect financial information.

The advent of new, “no-swipe” credit cards that transmit account and user information through radio frequency identification may make it possible, in some cases, for identity thieves to use a simple electronic device to capture the information.

(Continued on page 8)
YOU MAY BE VULNERABLE TO IDENTITY THEFT
(continued from page 7)

To protect your hard-earned money this holiday season:

+ Keep the amount of personal information in your purse or wallet to the bare minimum. Avoid carrying additional credit cards, your social security card or passport unless absolutely necessary.

+ Guard your credit card when making purchases. Shield your hand when using ATM machines or making long distance phone calls with phone cards. Don't fall prey to “shoulder surfers” who may be nearby.

+ Always take credit card or ATM receipts. Do not throw receipts into public trash containers, leave them on the counter or put them in your shopping bag where they can easily fall out or get stolen.

+ Proceed with caution when shopping online. Make sure that you are buying from a reputable retailer with a secure network.

+ Monitor your accounts. Do not rely on your credit card company or bank to alert you of suspicious activity. Carefully monitor your bank and credit card statements to make sure all transactions are accurate. If you suspect a problem, contact your credit card company or bank immediately.

+ Order a copy of your credit report from each of the three major credit bureaus. A law that took effect December 1, 2004, entitles you to one free credit report per year. Make sure it is accurate and includes only those activities you have authorized.

+ Place passwords on your credit card, bank and phone accounts. Avoid using easily available information like your mother's maiden name, your birth date, any part of your social security number or phone number, or any series of consecutive numbers. If you suspect a problem with your credit card, change your password immediately.

+ Do not give out personal information. Whether on the phone, through the mail or over the Internet, do not give out personal information unless you've initiated the contact or you are sure you know who you're dealing with and that they have a secure line.

+ Shred, shred, shred. Tear or shred any documents that contain personal information such as credit card numbers, bank statements, charge receipts or credit card applications, before disposing of them.

In order to make it more difficult for identity thieves to open accounts in your name, you can also contact the fraud department of any one of the three credit reporting agencies to place a fraud alert on your credit report. By law, the agency you contact is required to contact the other two agencies. The fraud alert tells creditors to contact you before opening any new accounts or making any changes to your existing accounts. The three major credit bureaus are Equifax, TransUnion and Experian.

If you are the victim of a crime, report it to the store in question and police immediately. Ask for a copy of the police report. You will need it if you want to file an insurance claim or report the crime to the FTC for their assistance. Victims of identity fraud can file a complaint on the FTC Identity Theft Web site, or by calling 1-877-IDTHEFT (1-877-438-4338).

Identity theft is covered by insurance. Some companies include coverage for identity theft as part of their homeowners insurance policy; others sell it as either a stand-alone policy or as an endorsement to a homeowners or renters insurance policy. The coverage provides reimbursement to crime victims for the cost of restoring their identity and repairing credit reports, including expenses such as phone bills, lost wages, notary and certified mailing costs, and sometimes attorney fees (with the prior consent of the insurer). Some companies also offer resolution services to guide you through the process of recovering your identity.

If you have any questions regarding insurance, contact your insurance company or representative. For more information about identity theft and insurance, go to the I.I.I. Web site at www.iii.org or call 1-212-346-5500.

Source: Insurance Information Institute
FIGHTING HOLIDAY POUNDS

We can always count on the holidays to challenge us with too many choices at the table. Too many extras and too little activity can equal extra pounds.

To prevent too many extra pounds piling on as festivities continue into the New Year, consider trying these simple strategies to help handle all those holiday temptations for the tummy.

**Eat an apple.** An apple a day does more than keep the doctor away. In a recent study people who ate an apple about 15 minutes before lunch consumed nearly 190 fewer calories. The study showed nearly identical results with a similar caloric amount of applesauce or apple juice. Interestingly, Brian Wansink, director of Cornell University's Food and Brand Lab in Ithaca, NY, says, "This is great evidence that it's not the calories, but it's the effort of eating that tricks us into thinking we're full."

**Eat soup first.** Eating soup prior to your meal reduces hunger and increases the feeling of fullness. Study participants consumed about 100 fewer calories when they ate soup rather than drank a similar quantity of beverages, including water. The caveat is that the soup must have a water base, rather than cream or cheese, which not surprisingly would add substantial calories. Remember that soup toppers like croutons and sour cream add calories. Opt for Manhattan tomato-based clam chowder and chicken vegetable soup over French onion with added bread and cheese and creamy-anything soup.

**Pace yourself.** Eat lighter earlier in the day for an event that's sure to include extra calories. However, avoid skipping breakfast or lunch. Typically the thinking goes something like this: "I'd better starve myself as much possible so I can really enjoy the goodies later." In reality skipping a meal causes your body to starve for calories but your satiety barometer can't work effectively and you often end up overeating to compensate. A better strategy is to pace yourself throughout the day to have a little less and then you can enjoy those "extras" later.

**Be picky.** Avoid the foods that are available to you any time like nuts, crackers, cheese and other processed foods. Spend your extra calories on specialty and home-made delicacies that you're likely to only have at this time of year.

**Little bites.** Who wants to feel deprived during the holidays? Go for little bites of many different things so you can taste it all. This boils down to portion control. Using a salad plate instead of a full-sized also can jump start this strategy for you in the buffet line.

**Burn calories.** Exercise is always a useful tool when you're looking to burn extra calories. If you already have an exercise routine, keep it up amidst the hectic hubbub of the holidays. If you can't fit in your entire exercise routine, just get your body moving. Walking is a great stress reducer and doesn't require special equipment or memberships-only comfortable shoes. Get a pedometer and use your holiday shopping time to work toward the recommended goal of 10,000 steps a day. Consider treating yourself when you're gift buying for others and pick up a workout DVD or a fit ball.

**Push away.** There is also the other form of exercise that's easy but we often forget to do. Push yourself away from the table or stand across the room from food on the buffet table and sprinkled around cocktail parties. Make it easier on yourself not to be tempted.

At this time of year we are so busy doing things for others that we forget to make ourselves a priority. If you put yourself first you'll feel better come January because you won't be trying to figure out how to get those extra pounds off. What a great way to start off the new year.

Source: Colorado State University Extension, Nutrition Resources, 12/27/07
HOLIDAY SHOPPING: IS A SALE PRICE YOUR BEST DEAL?

Holiday sale ads: they blanket the airwaves, jam your mailbox, and add another pound to your Sunday paper. Soon you'll be bombarded with ads for pre-holiday sales, preferred customer specials, early bird sales, midnight madness events, coupon savings days, and, don't forget, post-holiday sales. Sure you want a good deal, but just how do you decide if the deal is real? The Federal Trade Commission offers some tips to help you get the most for your money.

1. Shop around - A "sale" price isn't always the "best" price. Some merchants may offer the sale price on the item you want for a limited time; other merchants may discount the item you want everyday. Also, when you're comparison shopping, make sure you have: the item's manufacturer, model number, stock number or other identifying information.

2. Read sale ads carefully - Some may say "quantities limited," "no rain checks," or "not available at all stores." Before you step out the door, call ahead to make sure the merchant has the item you want in stock. If you're shopping for a popular or hard-to-find item, ask the merchant if they would be willing to hold the item until you can get to the store.

3. Take time and travel costs into consideration - If an item is on sale, but it's all the way across town, how much are you really saving once you factor in your time and the costs of transportation and parking?

4. Look for price-matching policies - Some merchants will match, or even beat, their competitors' prices. Read the merchant's pricing policy carefully. It may not apply to all items.

5. Go online - Check out Internet sites that compare prices for items offered online. Some sites also may compare prices offered at stores in your area. If you decide to buy online, keep shipping costs and delivery time in mind.

6. Carefully consider bargain offers that are based on purchases of additional merchandise. For example, "buy one, get one free" or "free gift with purchase." If you don't really want or need the item, it's not a deal.

7. Ask about sale adjustments. That is, if you buy an item at regular price and it goes on sale the next week, can you get a credit or refund for the discounted amount? What documentation will you need?

8. Ask about refund and return policies for sale items. Merchants may have different refund and return policies for sale items, especially clearance merchandise.

For more information, visit www.ftc.gov or call toll-free 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261.

Source: Connecting Lewis County, Nov/Dec 2007
Holiday Planner (continued from page 10)
Here are some ideas:

- Half cup trail mix made up of nuts, dried raisins, whole grain cereal or chopped apple
- A cupful of your favorite ready-to-eat low-fat whole-grain cereal in a snack baggie
- Whole grain crackers and light string cheese
- Graham snacks and a piece of fruit
- Mini-bagel with peanut butter
- Light yogurt
- One ounce dry roasted nuts

Home Sweet Home Plan
During these hectic times it's best to stock up on snacks you WANT to eat at your house.

- Cut up, chill, and store those raw veggies.
- Keep potatoes and sweet potatoes on hand to pop in the microwave.
- A large salad made up the night before works wonders and doesn't break the calorie budget.

Ready for Company Plan

- Reduced-fat crackers with hummus or low-fat cheese dip
- Fruit kebobs (use colored toothpicks) with yogurt dip
- Colorful veggies with a TANGY dip
- Baked chips and bean dip
- Low-fat muffins and quick breads
- Air popped popcorn topped with seasonings
- Colorful pasta salad

Sweet Plans
For those with a sweet tooth, try:

- Slices of angel food cake drizzled with strawberry sauce
- Festive fruit platter
- Small colorful cookies on a small plate
- Low-fat eggnog
- Flavored coffee

Source: Communicating Food For Health, October 2007

Consumers Warned To Avoid Fake E-mails Tied To Bank Mergers

Online scammers are taking advantage of tough economic times. While e-mails phishing for sensitive data are nothing new, scammers are taking advantage of upheavals in the financial marketplace to confuse consumers into parting with valuable personal information.

The Federal Trade Commission urges caution regarding e-mails that look as if they come from a financial institution that recently acquired a consumer's bank, savings and loan, or mortgage. In fact, these messages may be from "phishers" looking to use personal information - account numbers, passwords, Social Security numbers - to run up bills or commit other crimes in a consumer's name.

Consumers are warned not to take the bait. The FTC has advice about how to stay on guard against this type of scam. To learn more, see the consumer alert "Bank Failures, Mergers and Takeovers: A 'Phishterman's Special',' at http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/alerts/alt089.shtm.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive, and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop, and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit www.ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261.
SIMPLE STRATEGIES FOR WINTER WELLNESS

Get plenty of rest. Eat a balanced diet. Exercise regularly.

This mantra for physical well-being is only part of the story. While it may make you look like the picture of health, it takes more than that to develop a good defense against winter illnesses.

Develop a handwashing routine. Washing your hands is the single most important and easy way to avoid spreading germs that are responsible for colds, flu and staph infections. Some critical times to clean your hands are: before and after meals and snacks; before caring for young children; after touching a public surface; before and after preparing food, especially raw meat, poultry or seafood; after using the restroom; when hands are dirty; after touching animals; after coughing or sneezing; when you or someone around you is ill.

Learn how to wash your hands properly. Who doesn't know how to wash their hands? You'd be surprised! A quick rub with the soap and a splash under the water isn’t going to kill those germs. Here’s how to do it properly:

1. Wet hands with warm, running water. Then apply soap.
2. Rub hands together vigorously to make a lather, and then scrub all surfaces. Continue for 20 seconds, which is about how long it takes to sing two verses of “Happy Birthday.”
3. Rinse well under warm, running water.
4. Dry hands thoroughly, using paper towels or an air dryer. If possible, use a paper towel to turn off the faucet.

Stock up on handwashing supplies. In addition to traditional hand soap and water (which is the method of choice when removing dirt as well as germs), hand sanitizers and wipes are perfect for times when water is not available. Put them where you need them: in your desk, in your purse, next to the office’s communal coffee pot, at the workbench, in an older child’s lunchbox or backpack, or next to the changing table.

Avoid cross-contamination of food. The attack of “stomach flu” is most likely due to a foodborne gastrointestinal illness. Frequent and thorough handwashing and drying, especially during food preparation, is the best way to minimize the likelihood of contracting or transmitting these types of viral illnesses. But in addition to that, be careful with your food preparation utensils and surfaces. Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs away from other foods in the shopping cart, grocery bags, refrigerator, and on preparation surfaces.

Avoid contact with known allergens. Allergies affecting the nose or throat may increase the chances of getting a cold or flu. Be vigilant about cleaning routinely to help rid your home of dust, pet hair and other triggers.

Quit smoking; avoid secondhand smoke. Because smoking interferes with the mechanisms that keep bacteria and debris out of the lungs, those who use tobacco or who are exposed to secondhand smoke are more prone to respiratory illnesses and more-severe complications than nonsmokers.

Source: Cleaning Matters newsletter, September/October 2008
A CLEAN SWEEP FOR THE HOLIDAYS

As the holidays approach and the festivities begin, cleaning migrates farther and farther down on that "to do" list. But with guests coming and going, it isn't something you want to let slide.

Before the holiday havoc begins, schedule a general cleaning session, paying special attention to kitchens and bathrooms, floors and furniture. Read cleaning product labels carefully to make sure you're using them on the appropriate surfaces. Also pay careful attention to any cleaning instructions that are provided by a manufacturer, retailer, or installation specialist.

Wood floors: The vacuum cleaner and dust mop are generally the fastest and safest ways to clean wood floors. Wet mopping is generally not recommended.

Carpets: For carpets and large rugs, especially those with a deep pile, use an upright vacuum. Its rotating brushes are designed to agitate the dirt for optimum pickup. Because it's easier to transport, use a canister style for stairs, bare floors, and hard-to-get-at areas.

Ceramic tile: While the ceramic tile itself is easy to clean with a nonabrasive all-purpose cleaner, the grout may require some special attention, particularly in the bathroom, where mold and mildew can appear. Use a mildew stain remover or a solution of 3/4 chlorine bleach to one gallon of water. Gently scrub the grout with a soft bristle brush and then rinse thoroughly.

Countertops: Clutter is the number-one deterrent to clean countertops. So get it under control by developing a system. Open the mail over the trash basket or recycling bin so junk mail can get tossed immediately. Make a nightly sweep: Put newspapers in the recycling bin, current magazines in a magazine rack, dirty dishes in the dishwasher, and food in the cupboards. An accordion file folder is a good way to organize bills and other mail that requires attention.

Porcelain surfaces (including sinks, toilets, bathtubs): Use a nonabrasive all-purpose cleaner, then rinse and dry with a soft cloth.

Glass (including mirrors, shower doors, and glass table tops): Use a glass cleaner, a glass and multi-surface cleaner, or a solution of 1/2 cup of ammonia to one gallon of water. Rinse with a clean, damp cloth and dry with a clean cloth, paper towels, or a squeegee.

Keep a complete set of your favorite cleaning supplies on each floor of the house. They'll always be within easy reach for touch-up cleaning.

Upholstery: Vacuum thoroughly. Use a crevice tool to get in the creases and under the cushions where dust, crumbs, and other debris tend to collect.

Put mats and throw rugs at all entryways. This will help prevent dirt from being tracked into your home.

If your pets prefer the furniture to the floor, cover their favorite upholstered pieces with attractive, washable throws that can be whisked out of sight when guests arrive.

Invest in a few small, hand-held vacuums (cordless or with a charger) and leave them in strategic places around your home. They are perfect for quick pickups and light vacuuming.

Source: Cleaning Matters newsletter, November/December 2007
HEALTHY (AND FUN) HOLIDAY GIFTS FOR YOU!

It's all too easy to put on the pounds over the holidays by eating too many goodies and getting too little exercise. While shopping for holiday gifts, buy one or more of the following fun fitness-related items for yourself. Rev up your physical activity level without increasing your stress level. For the greatest benefit, open “your” present at the BEGINNING of the holiday season.

1. **Pedometer**
   A recommended walking goal is to build up to an average of at least 10,000 steps daily. Turn your holiday shopping and cleaning into a step-a-thon! Make some extra quick trips up and down the mall and shopping becomes an aerobic activity!

   **TIP:** If you don't like to fuss with programming a pedometer to figure mileage, buy one that only measures steps and is ready-to-go.

2. **A workout video or DVD**
   It's like having a personal trainer on call. Consider the fun factor - try something different, such as a dance video. For example, you can buy everything from tap dance to salsa workout videos. Don't worry about following the steps - when you're dancing by yourself, there are no toes to step on! Make up your own moves.

   **TIP:** Buy a video or DVD that is appropriate for your fitness level. For example, check that you don't buy an advanced level video of a workout if you consider yourself at the beginning phase.

3. **Stability or balance ball**
   Try sitting on a stability ball while you watch that favorite TV show. The continuous adjustment and readjustment that your body makes on the ball will help strengthen core muscles. Plus, it's a lot of fun and a great stress reliever to bounce up and down. All that bouncing can burn a few extra calories, too! You might even decide to do some exercises on the ball.

   **TIP:** Check the instructions on the box for the right size of the ball for your height.

4. **A new cookbook**
   You'll burn more calories standing to cook than in activities spent sitting down. According to an interactive tool, “How Many Calories Did You Burn,” on WebMD.com, a 140 pound person might burn 80 calories during a half-hour of cooking. A passive sitting activity, such as watching television from your favorite chair, burns about 32 calories. While these are estimates, you get the idea. Just 50 extra calories of activity daily - the difference between the two activities, could lead to a weight loss of five pounds a year. An added benefit of this activity is a delicious meal!

   **TIP:** Buy a cookbook that entices you to spend some time in the kitchen - don't feel you have to cook every day. For example, explore some of the cookbooks that use just a few ingredients.

5. **MP3 player**
   If you've wanted to buy an MP3 player, this is a terrific time to do it. This device is great for enjoying music or recorded books - whether cleaning the house or taking a brisk walk. It might motivate you to take an extra turn or two around the block or burn calories cleaning an extra room to finish a book chapter or song.

   **TIP:** Check with a salesperson or other knowledgeable source about the amount of memory you'll need with your MP3 player. You want to have the capacity to hold the number of songs, books, etc. for your intended use.

Source: Food Reflections newsletter 11/16/07, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension, Lancaster County
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