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Tips for holiday wellness

Stay mentally strong, fit and healthy during the holidays at any age

PORTLAND, Ore. — “Yes, there really is such a thing as healthy holidays!” says Touchmark Director of Health & Fitness Operations Kim Lehmann. With Portland’s sprawling acres to walk, bike and enjoy — and fairly temperate winter weather — the outdoors can help us stay healthy during these ultra-busy days.

“Unfortunately, many people, regardless of age, find this time of year more stressful than joyful. Worries about family dynamics, shopping and overeating can all take a toll.”

But, Lehmann stresses, it doesn’t have to be this way. To help keep your holidays wondrous and healthy, Lehmann has compiled the following tips to boost your spirit and energize your body.

Manage family dynamics

Holiday get-togethers with relatives are often cited as the primary source of seasonal stress, but there are ways to stay above the fray:

- Express your needs prior to large family gatherings. “Let your family know if you prefer not to drive after dark, a concern for many seniors,” Lehmann says. “And if you need to take a nap midday, do so, without apologies.”
- Minimize stress and reduce anxiety by setting realistic expectations for yourself. Recognize that age may play a factor in whether you can participate in marathon shopping trips and other seasonal chores. Don’t over schedule your calendar. Ask for help or outsource tasks such as baking cookies and hanging outdoor lights.
- Avoid or limit the time you spend with difficult or unsupportive family members and try to maximize time spent with those who support you.

Stay hydrated

Drinking enough water is just as important in the winter as in the summer, due to the drying effects of indoor heating. Additionally, people take more over-the-counter medicines in the winter, such as decongestants and cough medicine, which are typically more drying. Staying hydrated is critical to reducing cravings and making sure you can keep up with the holiday rush!

- Drink at least eight ounces of water first thing in the morning. Then one glass before and during each meal. You should consume half your body weight in just water each day.
- Always have water with you — in the car, at your bedside, in the kitchen.
- Squeeze ¼ to ½ of a fresh lemon into each 12-ounce glass of water. The lemon juice helps make the water more absorbable by your body.

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Fit in exercise

People are genetically programmed to increase body-fat composition in the winter, which makes it important to maintain muscle mass in colder weather. People living in colder climates tend to retain body fat more than those in warmer climates, so if you stop exercising during the winter holiday season, *you are more likely to gain weight.*

- Try to maintain your usual fitness schedule. Don't let competing demands of the holiday season derail your normal activities.
- Participate in activities that don't revolve around food, such as music, dancing or just walking around the block to view the neighborhood's holiday lights.
- Aim for a brisk, half-hour walk each day. The rhythm and repetition of walking has a tranquilizing effect on your brain, and it decreases anxiety and improves sleep.

Eat wisely

Paying attention to good nutrition is particularly important during the holidays, when it's easy to overindulge on sweets, alcohol and sugary beverages.

- It's okay to sample small servings of all those delicacies on that crowded buffet table, but make sure that vegetables and fruit are the largest portions!
- Some experts advise eating a small, nutritious meal or snack before heading off to the holiday party. Arriving with a full stomach will cut down on the empty calories you might be tempted to consume.
- Go easy on the alcohol. The more you drink, the less resolve you'll have to stay focused on your nutritional goals.
- Prepare holiday favorites with a healthy twist. For example, use nonhydrogenated oils/fats. In some baked goods, you can substitute pureed prunes, black beans and even unsweetened apple sauce, pumpkin puree or mashed banana for some or all of the fat. (General rule of thumb: Replace ¼ cup of the butter, oil or margarine in your favorite drop cookie and muffin recipes with one of the above.)

Don't slack off on sleep

Getting seven to eight hours of sleep each night is essential for optimal brain health and to keep a cheery holiday mood intact.

- Talk to your doctor if you are prone to insomnia, as the excitement and stress of the holidays can worsen this condition.

Lehmann is responsible for overseeing all aspects of health and fitness programming for Touchmark's communities in the U.S. and Canada, including the latest community under construction in Portland. Touchmark in the West Hills, situated on forested terrain just three miles from downtown and one mile from Providence St. Vincent Medical Center, will feature a comprehensive health and fitness club. Designed to meet the needs of people 50+, the club will include an indoor pool, aerobics and fitness studios, specialized equipment, training systems, personal trainers and more.

A unique retirement community with its vineyards, commanding views and full continuum of services and amenities, Touchmark in the West Hills is now accepting Priority Reservation deposits. More information is available at TouchmarkPortland.com, calling 503-954-1640 or visiting the information center at 5150 SW Griffith Drive in Beaverton, Oregon.

About Touchmark

An award-winning company, Touchmark builds and operates full-service retirement communities and has been a leader in retirement living for more than 35 years. Last year, Touchmark was a finalist for the Oregon Ethics in Business Award in the large business category. Sponsored by the Rotary Club of Portland, the awards showcase examples of high ethical standards for companies based in Oregon. More information is available at Touchmark.com.