

Heart-healthy holidays: Separating Facts from Fiction



Maintaining a healthy diet and lifestyle can be challenging enough all year long, but during the holiday season it can seem impossible. Festive gatherings filled with snacks and desserts can be both exciting and stressful, and it helps to know the consequences of the choices you make. Memorial Hermann Heart & Vascular is here to separate facts from myths, so you can take care of your heart during the holiday season.

Myth #1: Stress is unavoidable during the holiday season.

Fact: The season can feel fast paced and hectic, but it is important to take time to relax and recharge. Engaging in calming activities is good for your cardiovascular health and well-being. Find time for things you enjoy like reading, exercising, listening to music or talking with friends.

Myth #2: Skipping meals saves calories.

Fact: It may be tempting to skip meals to “save up” to consume calories at a holiday event or party. However, skipping meals can make you hungrier and lead to overeating. Plan to eat breakfast in the morning and have a light, healthy snack before holiday events.

Myth #3: Watching sodium intake is not important.

Fact: Excessive sodium consumption is linked to several cardiovascular health risks. Eating foods that are high in sodium, or adding salt to food, can increase the risk of developing high blood pressure which can lead to a range of heart-health concerns including heart attack and stroke. Make an effort to reduce your sodium intake to cut your risk of cardiovascular disease. Start by putting down the saltshaker, eating fresh fruits and vegetables, and reading labels to know the sodium content.

Myth #4: It's ok to skip exercise during the holidays.

Fact: The holidays often come with high-calorie meals, snacks and drinks that can leave you feeling tired or sluggish and not motivated to get daily exercise. Cold weather can also make you feel like staying indoors. It is important to maintain an exercise routine all year long, and especially this time of year. The holidays can disrupt normal, daily activities, so you may need to get creative to stay active. Consider using some year-end vacation days or PTO to head to the gym or take a walk outside.

Myth #5: You can catch up on sleep after the holidays.

Fact: Getting enough quality sleep is essential to staying healthy. The holiday season is busy, and your calendar may be more full than normal, but it is important to allow enough time for a full night's sleep. Lack of sleep is linked to chronic health problems including heart disease, obesity and stroke. Establish a sleep routine and begin preparing about 30 minutes before you go to bed.

Myth #6: Consuming extra alcoholic beverages during the holidays is ok.

Fact: It can be easy to consume alcohol during holiday parties. Drinks like eggnog, punch, wine, mixed drinks and ciders may be tempting, but it is important to remember they are high in calories, sugar and salt. The American Heart Association reminds us that a 12-ounce bottle of beer, a 4-ounce glass of wine and a 1 1/2-ounce shot of 80-proof spirits all contain the same amount of alcohol (one half ounce). Women should limit alcohol intake to one “drink equivalent” each day. Men should limit alcohol intake to one to two “drink equivalents” each day. Consider enjoying a small glass of alcohol for a holiday toast and then switch to water or another low-calorie, alcohol-free beverage.

(over)



To learn more, please
scan the QR code.

A Guide for the Season

10 heart-healthy holiday tips



Making healthy choices can be difficult during the holiday season. Family parties, work events and neighborhood gatherings are often full of tempting, high-calorie foods and drinks. Memorial Hermann Heart & Vascular has tips to help you enjoy the holidays and stay heart-healthy in the process.



1. Practice portion control.

Keep an eye on portion sizes and avoid overloading your holiday plate. Remember to eat slowly and enjoy the food. When the meal is over, put leftovers away in the refrigerator instead of leaving them out on the counter for grazing.



2. Stay active.

Getting regular exercise is especially important during the holiday season, especially if you are under additional stress. Be mindful of your daily schedule and find ways to integrate even small amounts of exercise into your day. Take the opportunity to turn exercise into family fun and ask people to join you.



3. Get plenty of sleep.

Quality sleep is important to maintaining good cardiovascular health. Allowing your body to rest and rejuvenate can strengthen your immune system and lower the risk of developing chronic conditions like high blood pressure.



4. Watch your alcohol intake.

Limiting alcohol consumption is important during the holidays. A festive environment and frequent gatherings with family and friends may come with increased opportunities to drink alcohol, but it is important to practice moderation.



5. Pay attention to your health.

It can be tempting to disregard healthy choices during the holidays, but this can have a negative impact on your heart health. Stick to your usual schedule of taking routine medications and remember to monitor your health and how you feel. Even while traveling, it is important to pay attention to any pain or discomfort you may experience. Be sure to seek medical attention if something feels abnormal.



6. Make time for self-care.

Holiday stress can lead to overeating or feeling emotionally drained and exhausted. Look for ways to practice self-care. Taking a walk, reading a book, or catching up with an old friend are good alternatives for overeating or other unhealthy choices.



7. Stay warm.

Although cold temperatures are not often a major concern in Greater Houston, it is important to make sure you stay warm. When temperatures drop, blood vessels constrict which raises blood pressure and can place stress on your heart. Dress in warm layers to prepare for changing temperatures and avoid being outside in frigid weather.



8. Wash your hands.

Holiday season is also flu season. Wash your hands often, with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, to help prevent spreading germs and be sure to get a flu shot.



9. Practice fire safety.

Research shows that most residential fires happen in the winter months. Never leave fireplaces, space heaters, food cooking on stoves, or candles unattended. Have an emergency fire-safety plan and practice it regularly.



10. Stay current with well checks and health screenings.

Keep up with your regular appointments with a primary care provider. Be sure to ask which exams you need and schedule them within the recommended timeline.

More Information: To learn more about heart healthy holidays, visit [memorialhermann.org/heart_holidays](https://www.memorialhermann.org/heart_holidays)

To schedule an appointment, please contact us at [memorialhermann.org/heart_contact](https://www.memorialhermann.org/heart_contact)