

***As the holidays approach we all want to enjoy our special time with family and friends. Susan Gauthier is the Wellness Concierge for Community Care Physicians. Below she answers some of your questions on how to enjoy the season while making healthy choices. Susan Gauthier can be reached during regular business hours at Community Care Physicians' office at the Capital Region Health Park in Latham, at 783-3110, extension 3347.***

***I do a lot of entertaining and attending social gatherings during the holidays. How can I be sure I'm eating healthy?***

The main rule to remember is moderation, whether this is in consumption of foods or alcohol. Many foods we enjoy during the holidays can be high in cholesterol and saturated fats and contain large amounts of sodium and sugar. Allow yourself to enjoy your favorites, but limit the quantity and choose small servings. Try to balance intake of these items with regular servings of fruits and vegetables, use lean meats and when possible, look for recipes that offer low-fat substitutions for ingredients.

As a host or hostess, try to offer low-fat, low-cholesterol options at each meal. Finally, try not to abandon your exercise regimen during the holidays. Try to remember balance and moderation rather than either excess or avoidance.

***Last year I spent several days with a backache after unpacking boxes of holiday decorations. How can I avoid doing the same this year?***

With all the social gatherings and holiday shopping, the last thing you want is a back injury. Whether it's bringing up those holiday decorations from the basement or carrying heavy gift packages, a few healthy back reminders will help to avoid any injuries. Proper body mechanics are important in avoiding back strain when lifting heavy objects. Always bend the knees and lower the body without bending at the waist when picking up items on the floor. Use the strong muscles in the legs to do the work as the object is lifted. Keep the heavy objects as close to the center of the body as possible. Keep your abdominal muscles strong. Weak abdominal muscles can predispose a person to lifelong problems with lower back pain that often surface when you lift heavy items.

***The holidays are supposed to be a time of enjoyment but so many of my friends seem to suffer from the "holiday blues". Any advice?***

The holidays can be a difficult time for many seniors especially if they live alone or don't have family close by. Many seniors are widowed, have lost close friends as they age, are separated from family and may be suffering from ill health. The following suggestions may help you to prevent or lessen those feelings of sadness and help to restore the joy of the season.

- Don't isolate yourself. If you can't be with family, invite some close friends over to share the holidays.
- Volunteer your time. Many churches or civic groups would be glad of your help. Helping others is a great way to forget your own troubles.
- Alcohol is a depressant and can intensify those feelings of sadness. Try to avoid alcoholic beverages
- Set a budget for gift giving and stick to it. Don't feel guilty if you can't afford to buy your family and friends expensive gifts, it's you they will remember not the gifts. Overspending will cause worry over bills after the holidays are over.

- Don't deny or try to hide your feelings of sadness. Very often just being able to share your feelings with someone can help.

***With all the visiting I do with friends and family during the holidays how can I stay healthy?***

Follow these precautions to stay free of colds and flu this winter. Most importantly, get a flu shot. People over the age of 50 should have an annual flu shot especially if they suffer from chronic disease. Take care of yourself. Your risk for colds and flu increases with stress, excessive fatigue and poor nutrition. Wash your hands often. Your hands can pick up cold and flu viruses from a variety of objects, including doorknobs. Avoid unnecessary contact with friends and family who have upper respiratory infections.