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## **Healthy Holidays Focus on Activity and Food**

The holidays are coming but your exercise and diet routines do not have to change with it. It may seem, at times, that the holidays cause changes in our exercise and diet routines. But by making a few modifications we can continue to be physically active and eat healthy even during the holidays. Explore different types of movement to find something you enjoy and be mindful of the foods and quantities of foods you eat.

There are many wonderful activities we can enjoy during the holidays. Finding the right fit is the key to continue healthy activities. “Enjoyment is one of the key things that we always highlight when encouraging physical activity,” says Emily Mailey, an associate professor of kinesiology at Kansas State University. “What one person enjoys doing may be very different from what someone else does. Sometimes we tend to have a very narrow idea of what counts as exercise, but in reality, there are lots of different ways to move your body and be physically active.”

While finding an activity we enjoy is key to a successful exercise routine, there are also other health benefits.

In fact, Kansas State University’s Sharolyn Jackson notes that during moderate or vigorous activity, our bodies and brain produce hormones and neurotransmitters that improve our mood, enhance memory, increase energy levels and elevate our sense of well-being.

“These are the body’s ‘feel good’ chemicals at work,” said Jackson, K-State Research and Extension’s family and consumer science specialist in northeast Kansas. “While your muscles will feel tired after activity, you will probably feel more relaxed. You may also feel a sense of accomplishment, which gives you a boost of self-confidence. Feeling better as a result of movement can be a powerful motivator.”

Physical activity will also help reduce falls and increase the likelihood of a person remaining independent. Being physically active will reduce many symptoms related to chronic disease such

as poor sleep, fatigue, shortness of breath depression, stress, pain, difficult emotions and physical limitations.

“Walking is an easy activity that most people can do. With the weather turning colder our outdoor walks may turn into indoor walks. Be creative with your routine and find a solution that works for you. One that you will continue and enjoy doing. Walk the halls of the local school, a store or inside the mall. One family walks their stairs going from one floor to another for physical activity during the cold snowy days of winter,” says Holly Miner, K-State Research and Extension’s family and consumer science agent for the Wildcat District (Crawford, Labette, Montgomery and Wilsons Counties).

The best way to tell if your physical activity is at the right level is determined by the fact that you can continue to carry on a conversation, talking but not singing while being engaged in the activity. In addition to exercising regularly, eating a healthy diet is crucial to avoiding those unwanted pounds during the holidays.

While nutrition plays a key role in our overall health there are some diets that are better than others. A Mediterranean eating style and the DASH (Dietary Actions to Stop Hypertension) diet to support brain health and reduce your risk of developing heart disease, diabetes and some types of cancer. Along with physical activity, and healthy eating, drinking water and getting adequate sleep are also important keys to good health.

Some tips to maintain a healthy body include:

- Eating a leafy green vegetable daily
- Making half your plate vegetables and fruits, especially berries
- Making half of your grains whole
- Eat fish twice weekly
- Enjoy lean proteins or protein alternatives such as beans and legumes
- Consume low-fat dairy products
- Change to healthy fats such as those found in nuts, or avocados or liquid oils such as olive or vegetable oils

So, while the holidays may change our activities and events, physical activity does not need to stop. Keep active and realize there are alternate ways to continue to enjoy being physically active. And being mindful of our diet will help us maintain our health throughout the holidays.

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