



# A Healthy Outlook!

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## Healthy Holiday Gifts

Thinking of giving cookies or a home-baked treat as a way to show you care this holiday season? Think again! Many people have difficulty with weight gain over the holidays as they are surrounded by an abundance of sweets and high-calorie food choices. To show you care, counteract unhealthy holiday habits by giving your loved ones a gift that promotes good health.

### Many holiday gifts can encourage healthy eating.

■ A cookbook, crock pot, and vegetable steamer are great gifts to help the recipient prepare foods in a healthy way. A nice set of oil and vinegar is a great gift and a healthy way to top a salad.

■ A healthy cooking class can be a fun, interactive way to learn a new skill and try out a new dish.

■ You can give your loved one a gift certificate for an appointment with a nutritionist or dietician. A nutritionist can help tailor a diet plan to the person's individual likes and dislikes and come up with a plan that the person is more likely to stick to.

### Need some ideas for gifts to encourage physical activity?

■ How about a session with a personal trainer? This can not only motivate, but it also can be a great learning experience for a new or experienced exerciser.

■ Signing up to take dance lessons also is a great physical activity that you can do together.

■ Hikers might appreciate a global positioning system (GPS) device or other

accessory, such as a walking stick.

■ Other gift ideas include a bicycle, ping-pong table, or indoor exercise equipment like a treadmill.

■ Some video game systems have special accessories that encourage physical activity.



### Encouraging physical activity doesn't have to be expensive.

■ Pedometers and heart rate monitors are great tools to help motivate while tracking progress.

■ Jump ropes, body bands, and exercise videos can promote exercise without emptying your pockets.

### There are many gift ideas for encouraging healthy behaviors in children. Any type of sporting equipment will not only encourage participation in sports, but also may create a lifelong love of activity.

■ Try a basketball and a hoop for your home.

## What Makes You Procrastinate?

We all procrastinate on occasion. For some people, it is a chronic problem; for others, it is only a problem in certain areas of life. Procrastination is always frustrating because it results in wasted time, lost opportunities, disappointing work performance, and generally feeling bad about yourself.

When you procrastinate, you allow less important tasks to take up the time and space that should be devoted to more important things. You do things like hanging out with friends when you know that an important work project is due soon, or going shopping instead of doing your homework. It also can be evident in behavior such as talking about trivial things with your partner to avoid discussing important issues in your relationship. Most people do not have a problem finding time for things they want to do.

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## Healthy Holiday Gifts, *continued from page 1*

🧺 Kids also love to experiment in the kitchen. Buying them a juicer or blender will promote healthy eating and teach them different ways to incorporate fruits and vegetables into their meals.

🧺 Art supplies or a musical instrument make a great artistic gift. Scientists have found that the arts can benefit both mental and physical health.

## Chronic stress has been linked to high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, stroke, and other cardiovascular problems. So why not give something to help your loved one relax.

🧺 A massage or a spa gift certificate can be a great gift to help ease stress, as can soothing music and aromatherapy candles.

🧺 A subscription to a healthy-living magazine can encourage healthy behaviors all year long.

Whatever the occasion, show your loved ones how much you care about their health and well-being. Offer holiday snacks in moderation and give healthy gift alternatives as much as possible. 🧺

Article written by Lisa Cooperstein, MS, ATC, wellness coordinator for MCPS. She can be reached at 301-279-3656 or by e-mail [lisa\_g\_cooperstein@mcpsmd.org].

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## What Makes You Procrastinate?

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But once they see a task as too difficult, painful, boring, or overwhelming, the procrastination behaviors begin. You are not alone if you have ever made any of the following excuses to yourself:

“It’s too cold to exercise outside today. I’ll wait until tomorrow when it’s warmer.”

“I’ve got too many other things to do first.”

“I’ll do a better job when I can concentrate on this project.”

“I still have lots of time to get this done.”

“They don’t pay me enough to do a more complete job. This is good enough.”

“This problem is too hard to talk about. I wouldn’t know where to start.”

“I work better under pressure.”

“It’s too noisy to work while my teenager is at home.”

“I should get the shopping done now because the stores will be more crowded later.”

“I can eat this pie tonight because I’m starting my diet tomorrow.”

These excuses seem fairly innocuous most of the time. However, they are not as innocent as they seem because they cause us to postpone important duties and projects. Ultimately, these excuses can keep us from accomplishing important goals and make us feel bad about ourselves.

## Why People Procrastinate

If you were hoping for a simple answer to this puzzle, you will be disappointed to learn that there are many reasons why people put things off. Here are a few of the most common ones (check those that apply to you):

■ **Avoiding discomfort.** Wanting to avoid pain makes many people shift into procrastination mode. However, the longer we delay, the worse the uncomfortable problem usually becomes. The rash gets bigger, the tooth hurts more, or the brakes squeak even more loudly.

■ **Perfectionism.** Those who believe they must produce the perfect report may obsess about uncovering every last information source and then write draft after draft. Their search for the perfect product takes up so much time that they miss their deadline.

■ **Laziness.** Sometimes people delay tasks that involve a slight inconvenience or minor discomfort.

■ **Thinking that you are not good enough.** Some people are convinced that they are incompetent. They think that they will fail, and so they procrastinate to avoid putting their skills to the test.

■ **Self-doubt.** Those who second-guess themselves probably suffer from procrastination. They may avoid new challenges and opportunities if it is uncertain that they will succeed. They may make feeble attempts to begin a project, and then feel that they could do a better job if they put in more effort.

■ **Workaholicism.** At the other end of the spectrum, many people who work excessively also fall into this category. They drive themselves ruthlessly, fearing that if they stop working, they will not be able to start again. Most self-doubters are driven by the belief that they must meet strict standards in order to see themselves as successful.

## Physics Review

Remember the concept of inertia: a mass at rest tends to stay at rest. For some reason, it is more difficult for most people to start change than to keep it going.

## Why Don't We Just Say No?

Procrastination produces mostly negative outcomes, so why don't we just change our behavior and eliminate these undesirable consequences? The reason is that procrastination reinforces itself. We avoid getting started by deliberately diverting our attention from the things we really should be doing. We do something else instead or make up a story about how we will accomplish the task in the future—when we are inspired, or when we have completed a preliminary step or some other trick.

Although recognizing how these diversions work will not cure your procrastination automatically, being aware of it is a good place to start working on the problem. Once you are aware of the ways that you procrastinate, you can start to change your behavior. You can begin the change process by thinking about what causes you to procrastinate and write down examples of these behaviors as you observe them.

If you want to read more about, and get help for, your own procrastination, you might take a look at *The Now Habit: A Strategic Program for Overcoming Procrastination and Enjoying Guilt-Free Play*, by Neil Fiore. ■

Adapted from an article by Cass Jameson, a licensed professional counselor, in the *Therapists Newsletter*. Used with permission.

**“Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success.”**

**—Henry Ford**

## Is Winter a SAD Time of Year for You?

Less daylight during the fall and winter causes depression in some people. We know that neurochemicals are involved in regulating our mood and functioning. Melatonin is a hormone that our brains produce during the hours of darkness. It is involved with regulation of sleep, body temperature, and release of hormones. As with any hormone, the amount produced is important. People with seasonal affective disorder (SAD) produce too much melatonin. This disrupts their internal body clock, leading to depressive symptoms. A drop in serotonin, a brain chemical (neurotransmitter) that affects mood, might play a role in seasonal affective disorder as well. Reduced sunlight can cause a drop in serotonin, possibly leading to depression. If you have had episodes of depression that clearly have an onset in fall or winter followed by remission of symptoms in the spring or summer, you may have SAD.

### Symptoms of winter-onset seasonal affective disorder:

- Depressed mood
- Irritability
- Hopelessness
- Anxiety
- Loss of energy
- Social withdrawal
- Oversleeping (feeling like you want to hibernate)
- Loss of interest in activities you normally enjoy
- Appetite changes, especially a craving for foods high in carbohydrates such as pasta, rice, bread, and cereal
- Weight gain
- Difficulty concentrating and processing information

### Treatment for SAD

#### Light therapy

This is the main treatment for many people with winter SAD. Light therapy involves sitting a few feet from a special lamp that is 10 to 20 times brighter than ordinary indoor light for 30 minutes or more each day, usually in the morning. You can do activities, such as reading or eating breakfast, while sitting in front of the light.

Light therapy is easy to administer and has relatively few side effects. Nearly 70 percent of people experience a reduction in their symptoms from daily light therapy; about 50 percent experience remission while undergoing light therapy. Light therapy needs to be done daily until springtime, when the sun shines for a longer period during the day. Lights from tanning beds cannot be used for light therapy because tanning beds use potentially damaging ultraviolet light.

Your health care provider can offer you guidance on purchasing a light. In addition, the Mayo Clinic [[www.mayoclinic.com/health/seasonal-affective-disorder-treatment/DN00013/NSECTIONGROUP=2](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/seasonal-affective-disorder-treatment/DN00013/NSECTIONGROUP=2)] has information to help you decide what light to purchase.

#### Medication

Your doctor may prescribe an antidepressant medication in combination with light therapy, or as an alternative if light therapy does not work. About 70 percent of people taking antidepressants have decreased symptoms, and about half experience remission while taking medication. The duration of treatment with medications varies. If you have a history of SAD, your doctor may suggest you start medication

before the time your signs and symptoms usually develop and continue the medication beyond the time the signs and symptoms usually abate. This may be from the middle of fall to the middle of spring. If you have a double depression, in which an underlying depression is complicated during the winter by SAD, your doctor may prescribe treatment with medication for a longer period.

#### Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy helps you identify and modify negative thoughts and behaviors that may influence signs and symptoms of SAD. You and your psychiatrist or therapist also may discuss ways to reduce stress in your life.

#### Coping skills

You can do things on your own to help you cope with seasonal depression. The following suggestions may help you better manage SAD:

- **Increase the amount of light in your home.** Open blinds, add skylights and trim tree branches that block sunlight.
- **Get outside.** Walk outdoors on sunny days, even during winter.
- **Exercise regularly.** Physical exercise helps relieve stress and anxiety, which can accentuate SAD. Being more fit can make you feel better about yourself.
- **Find ways to relax.** Learn how to effectively manage stress.
- **Take a trip.** If possible, take winter vacations in sunny, warm locations.

If you think you might have SAD, consider talking to your doctor about it, or call the EAP and schedule an appointment with a counselor. We can help you assess your symptoms and suggest next steps. ■

## Become a Better You...

### Know Yourself

Know and accept your weaknesses and faults (we all have them). But even more so, focus on your strengths, abilities, and gifts.

### Get Passionate

Enthusiasm and excitement about what you are doing can lead to finding your passion in life. Passion can create meaning and purpose.

### Don't Be Afraid of Making Mistakes

The key ingredient in success is never giving up. Keep on keeping on with your quest.

### Always Be on the Lookout for Opportunities

They are all around you. There are no permanent problems, only solutions, possibilities, and opportunities.

### Never Give Up on Your Dream

Be patient, persistent, and never quit.

Don't be in too much of a hurry to achieve your goals and dreams; enjoy the road to achievement.

### Have Fun!

Don't get too solemn or serious when things go wrong (as they surely will from time to time). "Live and work but do not forget to play, to have fun in life, and really enjoy it." —*Eileen Caddy*

Article written by Annette Hackey Runion, MA, University of MD School of Social Work graduate intern, adapted from *Here are 15 Steps to Fulfilling Your Dreams* by Craig Lock.



## Cold Fitness

Cold winter weather can frustrate even the most motivated exercisers. If you are not so motivated, it is very easy to pack your workout gear away with your summer clothes and forget about it until the weather starts to get warm. Don't pack the sneakers so fast. With a little planning, you can reap the rewards of working out in the winter-time.

Even in the cold weather, outdoor exercise has many benefits that make it worthwhile.

- It is a sure cure for cabin fever and the winter blues.
- It can increase energy, which can be sapped by gloomy weather.
- It is a great boost for your immune system. Studies show that moderate exercisers get 20 to 30 percent fewer colds than non-exercisers.

If you are not looking forward to another winter of pounding endless miles on the treadmill or power walking the malls, the good news is that you don't have to. Experts say that almost everyone can exercise safely in the cold, including people with asthma and heart problems. If you have health concerns, make sure to check with your doctor. Drink plenty of water or sports fluids before, during, and after your workout. You can become just as dehydrated in the cold as in the heat from increased sweating, breathing, and urine production.

One of the biggest mistakes cold-weather exercisers make is dressing too warmly. Exercise generates a considerable amount of heat and can make it feel almost 30 degrees warmer than it really is. At the same time, when you begin to tire and the sweat dries, you can get chilled. The solution? Dress in layers you can remove.

- Start with a thin layer of synthetic

material like polypropylene. This draws sweat away from your body. Avoid cotton, which will hold the sweat next to your skin.

- Next, try fleece for insulation and top with a waterproof, breathable outer layer.
- Remember also to wear gloves and thermal socks.
- Don't forget a hat or a headband—30 to 40 percent of heat is lost through your head.
- Finally, choose footwear with enough traction to prevent slips and falls.

While outdoor exercise in the winter is generally safe and rewarding, there are times when it may be best to stay indoors. Pay close attention to the wind chill. The wind can penetrate your clothes and remove the insulating layer of warm air that surrounds the body. If the temperature dips well below 0 degrees Fahrenheit, choose an indoor activity. It also is very important to watch for signs of frostbite, including paleness, numbness and loss of feeling, or a stinging sensation. If you suspect frostbite, get out of the cold immediately and slowly warm the affected area without rubbing. If numbness continues, seek emergency care. To help prevent problems, warm your hands and feet every 20 to 30 minutes, and know when to head for home.

When it is cold outdoors, there is no need to hit the couch. With a little knowledge and fortitude, you can meet the challenges—and reap the rewards—of winter exercise. ■

Article written by Lisa Cooperstein, MS, ATC, wellness coordinator for MCPS. She can be reached at 301-279-3656 or by e-mail [lisa\_g\_cooperstein@mcpsmd.org].

## Ask the EAP

**Q.** I understand that immediate family members of employees can use the EAP. If my spouse uses the EAP, will I be informed?

**A.** No—employees will not be informed if a family member uses the program. The same rules of confidentiality apply to all who come to the EAP. Barring concerns about harm to self or others, we can only speak to another person about a client with their written consent.

## A Healthy Outlook!

To help employees with troubling issues before they become overwhelming.



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE

SPECIALISTS: Debbie Tipton  
Robyn Rosenbauer  
Jeff Becker

EAP at Gaither Road  
2096 Gaither Road, Suite 205  
Rockville, Maryland 20850  
phone: 240-314-1040  
<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/eap>

Important Notice: Information in *A Healthy Outlook!* is for general information purposes only and is not intended to replace the counsel or advice of a qualified health professional. For further questions or help with specific problems or personal concerns, contact your employee assistance professional.

You may contact us or send your questions and comments to  
[Debra\\_Tipton@mcpsmd.org](mailto:Debra_Tipton@mcpsmd.org)

Please note that e-mail is not necessarily confidential.



## Upcoming Events

**January 10, February 14, March 14 — MCPS Cancer Support Group**  
**We will be meeting on the second Monday of the month at CESC, Room #240 from 12:30–1:30 p.m. For more information, please contact Debra Tipton [Debra\_Tipton@mcpsmd.org] on Outlook or by phone at 240-314-1040.**

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