

Create Warm Memories with Holiday Traditions

by Norma Schmidt

I remember just a handful of the Christmas presents I received as a child: My first Barbie doll with her skinny black sequined gown. My soft, pink Pat-a-Burp doll. The microscope I got in second grade.

But I have many, many memories of our holiday traditions. The lovely aromas of holiday ethnic food. Riding the South Shore train into Chicago to visit the "real" Santa. Using a paintbrush to decorate sugar cookies with colored frosting. Setting up our manger scene.

Traditions add so much joy to the holidays. Traditions give a child a sense of belonging and identity. They strengthen bonds across generations and live long in memory.

A family rich in traditions has a powerful antidote to commercialism. The more focused you are on pleasures that cost little or nothing, the more all the gifts tend to stay in their appropriate place.

Best of all, many traditions are perfectly suited to today's busy families. Here are a few favorites:

Simple Pleasures

Light candles at dinnertime. If December mornings are dark where you live, light candles at breakfast, too.

Take an evening stroll or car ride to look at Christmas lights.

Serve warm chocolate with candy canes for stirring.

The Joy of Giving

Let your kids in on the excitement of finding and wrapping gifts for those they love. Compliment them for being big enough to keep the surprise a secret.

As a family, decide on a charity and make a donation. Our favorite is Heifer International (www.heifer.org).

Take a plate of cookies or other holiday treats to a homeless shelter or to a police or fire station.

Gratitude

Give family members strips of paper in holiday colors. Let everyone write or draw something they're thankful for on each strip. Link the strips into a chain and hang as a decoration.

Write thank-you cards to each other. Decide together when to open them.

Connecting Generations

Interview grandparents, aunts, and uncles about holiday traditions they remember from their childhood. Adopt any traditions that fit your family.

Ask relatives for holiday recipes that have been handed down in your family. Or, search the Internet for holiday recipes related to your ethnic origins.

New Year's Eve

If your kids are little, it works fine to celebrate the new year at 9 PM instead of midnight!

Pull out photos and videos from the past year and share your memories.

Keep a box of inexpensive noisemakers and party hats that you can re-use each year. The kids will enjoy pulling out their old favorites.

New Year's Day

Decorate a box in which you'll put photos, ticket stubs and other souvenirs of the coming year. Talk about your hopes and wishes.

Let each family member put New Year's resolutions into their own envelope. Author Mimi Doe ("Busy But Balanced") has a tradition of sealing the envelopes with wax -- a nice, magical touch.

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Norma Schmidt, Coach, LLC, specializes in helping working mothers create balance. She offers workshops, teleclasses, and individual and group coaching.

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18 Tips for Keeping off the Weight During the Holidays

by M. Scott Stanley, MS

The holiday season can bring much happiness and cheer, but it can also lead to adding several unwanted pounds of body weight. The following are some tips to help you fight the “battle of the bulge” during the holiday season!

- » Don't go to a holiday party hungry! Eat a healthy snack (especially a protein-rich snack) before eating a big holiday meal. It will help to prevent overeating.
- » When going to a holiday party, take a healthy dish with you for yourself and others.
- » Eat your food slowly. In addition to savoring the flavor of your food, it will help to prevent overeating.
- » Choose water, diet soda, or unsweetened tea for a beverage instead of regular soda, alcohol, eggnog, etc. It will save you a lot of calories.
- » Trim the fat and skin off of meat. This will save you a lot of fat and calories.
- » Control your portion size. It's okay to treat yourself, but remember to keep everything in moderation.
- » When preparing foods, use lower fat substitution ingredients such as skim milk instead of whole milk, fat free cooking spray or applesauce instead of cooking oil, and fat-free margarine instead of butter.
- » Try to limit the amount of alcohol you consume. Alcohol is loaded with empty calories that go right to the belly! Some drinks can contain as much as 500 calories!
- » When buying eggnog, choose a low-fat or fat-free version. They are often just as tasty but will save you as much as 340 calories and 19 grams of fat per cup!
- » Limit the amount of high fat foods you consume. Fried foods and desserts can be the worst to eat if watching calorie and fat content.
- » When choosing snack foods, healthy snacks such as nuts, pretzels, low-fat cheeses, vegetable trays, and popcorn tend to be lower in calories and fat than most finger foods.
- » Drink plenty of water. This will keep you hydrated in warm, dry environments, and prevent you from overeating.
- » Don't stand next to the food when socializing. It will increase your chances of nibbling constantly.
- » Eat low-fat dairy products and high fiber foods such as whole grains. They will help to keep you full and maintain your weight over the holidays.
- » Don't over do it on holiday cakes, cookies, and pastries, as they are loaded with sugar, fat, and total calories.
- » Try not to eat too much fast food during a very hectic holiday season.
- » Look for a good low-fat holiday cookbook.
- » Try to be active at holiday parties, and be sure to obtain 30 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous exercise 3-5 days per week.

Happy Holidays from Symmetry Wellness!