

Healthy Holiday Challenge

Overview

December tends to go by in the blink of an eye. Between holiday celebrations, preparing for school vacations, and having less sunlight during the days, it's far too easy to rush through the last 31 days of the year. But it's important to take time during the holiday season to reflect on things we may be thankful for and to celebrate how those things impact our health. To help make this easier, we're challenging you to participate in our Game On Holiday Challenge each week this December!

Week 1: Jingle Bell Hopping

Whether it's the snow in your backyard or the remnants of too much turkey at Thanksgiving, it can be hard to get moving this month. Staying active is important, so try these activities.

- Sign up for a local holiday-themed road race to run as a family. Can't find any in your area? Recruit a couple neighbors and organize a fun run yourselves to get all the kids involved!
- Bring your kids or students out to play in the snow and build your own snowperson or snow fort! Or, bundle up and hit the local park for a game of flag football or soccer.
- Set up a Jingle Bell-themed [Fitness Circuit Course](#)! Fitness circuit courses can easily be done with a smaller group like your family but are also a fun way to



get friends, neighbors or other students involved by just breaking up into smaller groups of 3-4!

To start, get your favorite holiday playlist ready to go!

- Set up 6-10 different exercise stations in a large space that are age appropriate for your group. Try to mix things up so each station involves working a different muscle group. Here are some examples of fun exercises to try:
 - Jump rope
 - Star jumps
 - Lunges
 - Skipping between cones
 - Crab walk between cones
 - Planking
 - Jumping jacks
 - Squats
 - Single leg balance
- Once your stations are all set up and you've broken into groups, get the holiday jams playing. Have everyone stay at each station, performing the designated exercise, until the holiday song ends!
- Move clockwise to the next station, and start the new exercise while the next song plays.
- Continue through all of the exercises until each group completes all the circuits or your holiday playlist ends!

Week 2: Give Back to Your Community

Health isn't just about eating fruits and vegetables and being active every day (although those are both very important!). It's also about promoting an overall sense of wellbeing and health throughout your community. This week, challenge yourself and your family to do this by giving back to others!

- Clear out your closets and donate all those winter coats, hats and scarves that you or your kids don't wear. Don't live in a colder climate? That's okay, there's still plenty of clothing to donate! New socks are one of the most needed items by those suffering from homelessness.

- Donate canned food to a nearby food pantry so that others can also enjoy a healthy, hunger-free holiday season. Connect with local schools, grocery stores, community service organizations or faith-based organizations to see if they're coordinating food campaigns you can contribute to.
 - If not, organize one yourself! Call your local food pantry and see what items they need most this holiday season and what policies they may have in place about items they can't accept (such as perishable goods). Send emails or post fliers around your neighborhood or your child's school, including the details provided by the food pantry, and put out large empty boxes to collect all the food items.
- Get your school involved by organizing a donation drive for any of the items above. Another fun way to involve teachers and students is to see if any of the after-school clubs or teams accept donations of sneakers for children. For many kids, the cost of new sneakers may prohibit them from getting involved in physical activities, so this is one way that you're not only giving back to your community, but helping make sure kids stay healthy, too.

Week 3: Put a Healthy Twist on Your Favorite Holiday Dish

One of the best parts of the holidays is the traditions. For many of us, our favorite holiday memories are tied to a special side dish, dessert or recipe that's been passed down through the family. This week, try a healthy twist on a classic holiday dish! Having a few lighter desserts and some more green veggies around the holiday table will make it a bit easier to stay healthy this month.

Below are some of our favorite ingredient swaps to help make recipes a bit healthier. Not all of these swaps are a 1-to-1 ratio when using them for a recipe, though, so make sure to research first.

- Instead of: Sour cream or mayonnaise Try: Plain Greek yogurt
- Instead of: Oil (in baked goods) Try: Apple sauce
- Instead of: Russet potatoes Try: Sweet potatoes
- Instead of: White rice Try: Brown rice or quinoa

- Instead of: Heavy cream (in recipes) Try: Evaporated skim milk
- Instead of: White bread Try: 100% Whole Wheat or Whole Grain bread
- Instead of: All purpose flour Try: 100% Whole Wheat flour
- Instead of: Sugar (in recipes) Try: Vanilla extract, nutmeg or cinnamon

Then, get other parents and teachers together and organize a [Healthy Holiday Celebration](#) at your school!

Week 4: Practice Thankfulness

Similar to giving back to your community, your family's health also includes mental and emotional well-being. Holidays frequently bring with them chaos and stress, and it's important to remember to slow down, breathe, and practice being thankful. This week, as you and your kids wrap up your 2018 and prepare for the upcoming year, take some time together to be still. A few of our favorite ways to practice being thankful and grateful for our health are below.

- Go [screen-free](#) as a family!
 - Take a family pledge to spend a day away from your cell phones, tablets, computers, televisions and other devices. Use that time to get closer as a family and be thankful for the support and love you bring to one another. Find a fun family activity you all enjoying doing together that doesn't involve screen time:
 - Go on a family hike
 - Cook a healthy meal together
 - Have a family dance-off or family game night
 - Go to your local library and pick out some new books to read at home
 - If stepping away from your devices for a full day is too difficult, try starting out with just a couple screen-free family meals this week instead. Everyone may be a little hesitant at first, but once the conversation gets flowing, they'll forget their phones and iPads are stored away.

- Plant a garden! Depending on your December weather, gardening can be a great way to get outside, get in touch with nature, and plant some fresh veggies for later this spring. You can even plan ahead and plant some extra fruits or veggies to do a taste test with at your school when you harvest them. [Check out Grow to Learn NYC's list of cool and warm season crops](#) to get ideas about what crops may be the best for your winter climate.

Related Activities

12 Days of Fitness

Get kids moving during the holiday season with themed fitness activities.

Give Back by Wasting Less

At a time when 1 in 6 children are hungry, taking a few simple tips to reduce food waste will not only save money, but it can also give back to those individuals and families in need.

Stay Active During Winter Break

Is it too cold or snowy to go outside and play during winter break? Get creative with these indoor activities that will get students and families moving and having fun!

