

Giving or receiving food gifts this year? Remember food safety

Food products are popular holiday gifts, but both giver and receiver need to pay attention to food safety. Delays in transit can lead to spoilage. Products from a mail-order company, such as fresh and cooked meat, poultry and fish, smoked fish, most canned hams, summer sausage, and cheesecake, probably will be marked, "Keep refrigerated." When receiving a perishable food item, open it immediately and check the temperature. Mail-order food should arrive frozen or partially frozen with ice crystals still visible. Refrigerate immediately.

Even if a product is smoked, cured, and/or fully cooked, it still is perishable and must be kept cold. If perishable food arrives warm, notify the company. Don't eat or even taste it.

When ordering food products, it's usually best to have them sent to homes instead of offices, which might not have adequate refrigerated storage. Try to arrange for delivery at a time when the recipient will be home to accept it. While most mail-order companies are well equipped to send perishable foods in packaging that keeps them cold, this may not be pos-

sible when doing your own mailing. If you do ship products requiring refrigeration, use an insulated cooler or a heavy cardboard box with a cold source such as frozen gel packs. Write "Keep refrigerated" on the outside of the package. Put handling instructions on the food itself, too. It's best to specify overnight delivery and to notify the recipient of its expected arrival. Send packages early in the week so they don't sit in the post office over the weekend.

It may be wise to send non-perishable foods instead, such

as quick breads, fruitcakes, cookies, candies, seasoned or candied nuts, dry snack mixes, and seasoning mixtures. Canned products, including jams and jellies, require careful packaging. Leave screw bands on jars. Make sure you use up-to-date, tested methods for canning products. For an extra margin of safety, recipients can boil low-acid home-canned

food (meats, fish, poultry, vegetables) for 10 minutes before eating, to destroy botulism, a deadly foodborne illness. Safe home-canning procedures haven't been determined for many home-canned products such as mustards, so refrigerate instead.

Source: Carolyn Raab, Extension food and nutrition specialist, Oregon State University

Tips given for safe holiday shopping

Since the holiday season is just around the corner, here are some safety tips on how to avoid becoming a victim of crime. When you are shopping:

- Avoid shopping alone. Take a friend or a relative to help you carry bags or packages.
- Park in a well-lighted space, and be sure to lock the car, close the windows, and hide shopping bags and gifts in the trunk.
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash; pay with check or credit card whenever possible.
- Always be aware of your surroundings. Don't be easily distracted; know where your shopping bags, packages, or other personal items are at all times. If you carry a purse or handbag, do not to leave it unattended.

• Shopping with kids? Teach them to go to a store clerk or security guard if you get separated.

• When walking back to your automobile, have your lock key ready. Avoid having to look for it in your handbag. When parking, try to park near or as close as possible to the store entrance.

• Check under and around the car and the back seat before getting in.

• Do not leave shopping bags exposed in your car while unattended.

• If you think are you being followed, call 911 from your cell phone or drive to a public place or a police, sheriff, or fire station.

In the event of credit card theft, notify your bank(s) immediately. It is recommended that

you close your accounts and obtain new account numbers. If your credit card(s) were stolen, call your credit card issuer immediately. Get replacement cards with new account numbers. Ask that old accounts be processed as "account closed at consumer's request." This is better than "card lost or stolen," because when these statements are reported to the credit bureaus, they can be interpreted as blaming you for the loss. Follow up in writing; this protects you in case of a dispute with the credit card issuer.

Call the fraud units of the three credit reporting companies: Experian 1-800-301-7195, Equifax 1-800-525-6285 and Trans Union 1-800-680-7289. Ask that your accounts be flagged and a victim's statement be added to your report - This is a must.

Source: Oregon State Extension Service

Fight holiday depression

by the American Counseling Association

While the holiday season is usually one of joy, happiness and celebration, for many people the emotion of the season is often depression. Fortunately, it doesn't have to be that way. Many of the things that leave us feeling depressed are things we can control.

For example, the constant stream of media and advertising holiday images contributes to depression for many people. Comparing our own lives to these unrealistic images of holiday perfection, it's easy to feel left out, inadequate, or as if we aren't getting all that's due us.

There's no avoiding the holiday media/advertising blitz, but it's easy to accept that what we're being shown isn't reality, it's make-believe. We don't have to compete with that.

Eating healthier and getting enough rest is another way to fight holiday blues. Holiday foods usually mean too many rich, high-calorie party temptations, treats loaded with sugar, and opportunities to drink too much. Toss in a busy holiday schedule and it's easy to feel tired, unhealthy, overweight and generally depressed.

So should you just avoid all those holiday foods? Actually, no, since that can leave you feeling deprived and more likely to finally over-indulge. In-

stead, use common sense and moderation. Limit alcohol consumption and enjoy your favorite holiday foods, but in reasonable-sized portions and without going back for seconds.

And don't forget exercise. It's often ignored in busy holiday schedules, yet studies show that even small or moderate amounts of exercise can lift your spirits. It's also a great way to burn those extra calories of the season.

Lastly, don't let depression rule your life. Holiday socializing is a great way to combat the blues. Make the effort to go and meet people at a party, or just call up a friend to go for coffee and talk about interesting things. Spend time with others and refocus your thinking on positive things you enjoy.

Eating right, exercising, taking a realistic view of the holiday madness and having an active social life all take effort, but they're all essential to helping you enjoy the holiday season. Even small efforts in these areas can help you feel better physically and mentally.

But if you find nothing seems to help fight that holiday depression, talk to a counseling professional. They're trained to help you work through and cope with these feelings.

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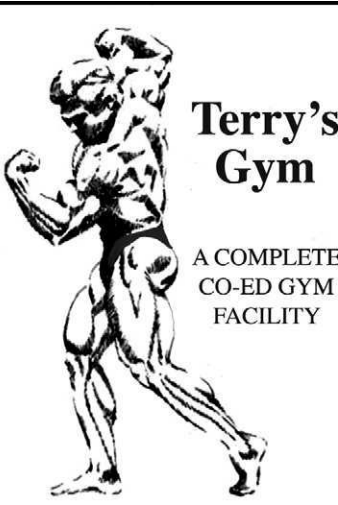
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