

## Be a thoughtful food gift giver

Gifts from the kitchen provide a way to give from the heart. Being fancy or elaborate isn't important – being thoughtful is. Just as in selecting non-food gifts, it's important to consider the needs, interests and abilities of the receiver when planning and preparing holiday gifts of food. Points to consider:

- Avoid adding nuts or coconut for young children or the elderly. These ingredients could create a choking hazard. Also, some people are allergic to nuts.
- Consider chewing abilities. Sometimes elderly people have tender gums or missing teeth, so softer food items are in order.
- If you know the recipient has diabetes or is working to maintain a healthy weight, don't tempt with high-calorie treats. Opt for soup mixes or low-fat, whole-grain fruit

bread.

- Consider household size. A single person or couple may enjoy a small fruit basket, but find a case of fruit overwhelming. Give items in proportion to the household size.

- There is often an abundance of foods during the holidays, so think about a gift for the weeks ahead. Coordinate a festive basket complete with the recipe and ingredients needed to prepare a special meal.

- For your friends or family members with limited cooking skills, give a Meal of the Month certificate. Pledge to prepare them a meal once a month. This would be a special gift for those who live alone or find cooking a challenge. Plan to share the gift of your time and enjoy the meal with them.

Source: Lynda Johnson, R.D.,  
University of Missouri Extension

## Are worries keeping you awake at night?

by Robert Evans Wilson, Jr.  
(www.jumpstartyourmeeting.com)

The other day on the radio I heard these lyrics from the Shinedown song, *If You Only Knew*, "It's 4:03 and I can't sleep...I toss and turn like the sea." I thought, "Yeah, why is it always 4:00 a.m. that I wake up when I'm worried about something?" The singer of this top 10 pop rock song was troubled by a woman. What's keeping you awake?

Most of us, at one time or another, have spent sleepless hours in bed worrying about something. Then making it worse, you're tired the whole next day.

Over the years, I've ruminated over all sorts of things. Big issues I have little or no control over like politics, the environment, terrorism, and the econo-

my. Personal issues that I need to affect such as my business, my family, and my relationships. I have even worried over my volunteer work. Churning the same thoughts over and over again.

Some of us worry about the past – what could've been if only we had done something differently. Others worry about some future problem that hasn't even occurred yet.

Worry feels like motivation because it is rooted in the desire to fix a situation, but it is actually a de-motivator. It robs us of valuable energy we need to live a productive life. I love this modern update to an old proverb: "Worry is a brisk ride on a rocking horse; you burn a lot of energy, but you don't get anywhere." It is an amusing proverb that creates an accurate metaphor, but it does not offer us an answer on how to deal with worry.

For a simple solution on countering worry, I've always enjoyed the lyrics of this Irving Berlin song from the movie *White Christmas*: "When I'm worried and I can't sleep, I count my blessings instead of sheep; and I fall asleep, counting my blessings." Although, I must admit that I didn't really

hear these sage words or make use of them for years.

When I finally did; I found that it really works. Sometimes we have to start with the basics, and remind ourselves of all that we do have and all that is going smoothly in our lives in order to put the troubling matter into perspective: "I have a roof over my head, I have my health, I have food in the house, I have a car, I have friends, etc."

I recently revisited Dale Carnegie's book, *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*. It was written during the Great Depression and World War II. A period of time when most people had plenty to stress over. The advice still holds up today.

The trick is to divert your pensive energy into practical projects. Carnegie suggests that we focus on doing our best one day at a time and the future will take care of itself. In other words, keep busy! Get so caught up in your work that you have no time to ponder all the "What ifs" that have been running like a broken record in your mind.

He also suggests that you ask yourself, "What is the worst that could happen?" Then he

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*Wishing you a Merry  
Christmas and a  
Happy New Year*



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## Walking keeps your brain young

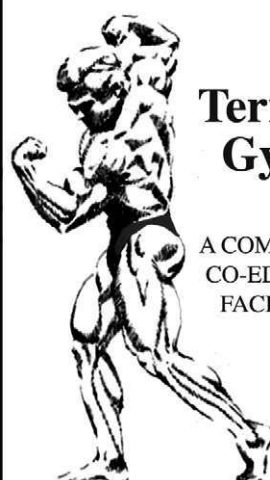
Researchers have found that older adults who walk regularly perform daily tasks more efficiently, maintain their independence, and are less likely to suffer a disability. A new study from the University of Illinois reveals that walking also helps

the brain.

This study monitored brain activity of sedentary adults, aged 59 to 80, who joined a walking group for one year. The researchers also measured brain activity in younger (18- to 35-year-old) adults. Brain activity was measured in brain regions that function together as networks. As one ages, the circuits in the brain become less connected.

The results showed that older adults who walked at least 40 minutes three times a week had brain activity networks similar to those of the 20 year-olds. They also had an improvement in memory, attention, planning, prioritizing, strategizing, and multi-tasking. These results did not happen over night; it took one year of walking before these benefits occurred.

Source: OSU Extension Service



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