

Media Release

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TOP TEN TIPS FOR A HEALTHY, HAPPY HOLIDAYS

VicHealth has put together some handy tips to help Victorians have a healthy and happy Christmas and New Year season.

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said while it's normal to indulge a little over the holiday season the New Year was a great time to focus on how we can improve our health.

"Being festive doesn't mean completely forgetting the healthy habits we've gained throughout the year. There are small things we can do to ensure we start the New Year feeling healthy and energised," Ms Rechter said.

"Everything in moderation is a really good outlook to have. Pile your plate with veggies to have with your Christmas ham, go for a walk around the block to warn off a food coma and limit your booze to ensure you start 2019 in a healthy way.

"We're only as healthy as our community so it's important to remember those less fortunate than us as well. Helping others not only contributes to a healthier society but also makes us feel good so it's a win-win."

Survive and thrive during the festive season with these top ten tips

1. You *do* win friends with salad

Let's face it, the food is one of the best parts of the holiday season. It's Christmas so treat yourself but try to also leave plenty of room on your plate for the good stuff – salads, veggies and fruit. Aim to fill at least half your plate with veggies and salads then add meat and trimmings. Hosts, it's a good idea to have plenty of colourful salads and veggie dishes as part of your spread – that way you'll also be covered if a surprise vegetarian guest arrives. With so many great tasty recipes to try give veg a chance!

2. Leave the hangover in 2018

Who wants to start 2019 with a hangover? Yet so many of us welcome in the New Year with a splitting headache after a big night on the booze. Too much grog can not only make us feel terrible the next day but also puts us at risk of a range of serious health issues, including increasing our risk of cancer. Try to limit your drinking by choosing lower strength drinks, drink lots of water and make sure you eat while drinking.

3. Give it back

One of the best things about the holiday season is the sense of community coming together. During this busy time of year, it's important to think about those who are less fortunate and do our bit to give back. It doesn't have to be an expensive donation – you could volunteer at a local charity, donate food from your pantry or buy a present for a child who would otherwise go without. You can also give a lifesaving gift to the community by donating blood – there is a high need over the holidays so if you can, roll up your sleeves.

4. Drop the devices

We spend an incredible amount of our time glued to our phones, tablets and computers. They have become an essential part of our lives but we are yet to fully understand their impact on our physical and mental health. Research has linked too much screen time to reduced physical activity, social isolation and even depression. Over the holidays challenge yourself to a digital detox by taking a few days off from your screens. Extra points if you can get away somewhere and connect back to the natural world.

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5. Feel the love

Christmas and New Year is the perfect time to catch up with family and friends. Spending time with loved ones is great for our physical and mental health and could even prolong our lives. Research suggests that people with strong social connection live longer, healthier lives. If you're feeling a little lonely over the holidays reach out to family or friends and share how you're feeling. If that's not an option for you, try volunteering for a charity or community group who often need extra help over the break.

6. Move it don't lose it

There's no doubt that staying active over the holidays can be a real challenge. With all the social activities, Christmas shopping, and party planning, getting to the gym isn't too high on most people's holiday to-do-lists. Yet being active has a range of benefits beyond helping to ensure your clothes fit after too much pudding. Being active helps keep stress at bay, keeps us fit and just makes us feel good! Every bit counts so park a bit further from the shops or have a boogie in your loungeroom to get your blood pumping and clear your mind. And don't beat yourself up if you can't maintain your normal fitness regime – even a quick walk trumps the couch.

7. Share the load

Delegation is key to getting through big (ie stressful) holiday events. If you're hosting Christmas lunch or a New Year's party don't feel like you need to do everything yourself. Get your guests to bring a dish or help set up to lighten the load. And with Aussie women still doing the lion's share of household tasks – including the mental burden of organising Christmas – men, it's well and truly time to step up. The days of women slaving away over a hot stove while men play backyard cricket with the kids should be relegated to the past – it's up to all of us to pitch in and make it happen.

8. Give the gift of health

If you want to give your friends and family the gift of good health in 2019 why not choose a Christmas gift focused on physical activity or wellbeing? Think sporting equipment or new active wear to get them moving, a spa or massage voucher for someone in desperate need of some me-time or a healthy cookbook for your whiz-in-the-kitchen friend. For those giving to kids be mindful of giving screen-based presents. Our kids spend more than 30 hours a week in front of screens – why not give them a gift that gets them away from their devices and into the outdoors like some seedlings, boogie boards or camping equipment?

9. Ditch the drama

The Christmas holidays are a great time to have fun with family and friends but let's face it, it can also be quite stressful. Stress can impact our physical and mental wellbeing, so take care of yourself. Make some time for you these holidays – read a book, go for a run, listen to music or just sit in a park. Some people also find mindfulness activities such as yoga, tai chi or meditating can also help keep stress at bay. If you feel like you're not coping, reach out to a friend or family member or contact a support service like [beyondblue](http://beyondblue.org.au).

10. Butt out

If you're a smoker make your New Year's resolution to quit. Smoking is one of the worst things we can do for our health and it's never too late to quit. The good news is when you quit you experience the health benefits almost immediately and within 15 years your risk of heart attack or stroke is almost the same as someone who's never smoked. There's plenty of support to help you kick your smoking habit, for good! Visit www.quit.org.au for support.

Media Contact

Rachel Murphy, Senior Media Advisor P 03 9667 1319 M 0435 761 732 E rmurphy@vichealth.vic.gov.au