

Healthy Holiday Gifts

Almost two-thirds of Americans are overweight or obese, and more than half don't get enough physical activity. This holiday season encourage your friends and relatives to eat healthier and get moving by giving them health-related gifts. You might want to buy duplicates for yourself!

Gifts for Healthy Eating

Home-made food, cooking ingredients and kitchen tools are sure to please almost everyone on your list. The possibilities are endless, but here are a few practical gift ideas to get you started.

Fruit & Vegetable Basket: Give a colorful selection of fruits and vegetables, keeping them at optimum quality by assembling the basket shortly before giving it. Many grocery stores will help put one together for you. Here are a few items you could include: green and red grapes; apples; oranges; grapefruits; lemons; limes; bananas; kiwi; strawberries; tomatoes; peppers (red, orange, green and yellow); broccoli; zucchini and onions.

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends eating 2 cups of fruits and 2½ cups of vegetables every day, based on a 2,000-calorie diet. Eating a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables every day helps maintain good health, protect against the effects of aging and reduce the risk of cancer and heart disease.

Healthy Snack Jar: Select a clear, covered container and fill it with packages of healthy snacks such as: little boxes of raisins; non-fat snack bars; trail mix; 100-calorie packs of various crackers; dried fruit; baked chips and pretzels. These snacks are low in fat and sugar but may provide vitamins, minerals and fiber. The see-through container makes it easy to tell when it's time to refill.

“Gift Certificate” for Food From Your Kitchen: Give a home-made “gift certificate” for fresh, healthy treats from your kitchen. You might promise to cook a complete meal for six people or to bake one fresh loaf of bread per month for the next year.

Assortment of Herbs & Spices: Buy several small containers of seasonings to add new zest and taste to foods formerly flavored by salt, sugar and fat. Add a few less common herbs and spices for your family and friends to try, also.

No-Salt Seasonings: Health-conscious cooks, and especially those with high blood pressure, appreciate no-salt seasonings that help in lowering overall sodium intake. Spices and herbs that are effective in replacing the taste of salt include: black pepper; minced garlic or garlic powder; minced onion or onion powder; dill seeds; basil; oregano; parsley; cumin; curry powder; ginger and coriander. Avoid garlic salt and onion salt.

Sweet-Tasting Spices: These spices reduce or eliminate the need for sugar in foods: cinnamon; allspice; cloves; anise; nutmeg; ginger; cardamom and mace. Cutting back on dietary sugar benefits everyone, especially diabetics.

Seasonings That Cut the Fat: Herbs and spices contain very few calories compared to gravies, sauces, batters, breadings and fried foods. In fact, removing a tablespoon of fat from food also removes 100 calories and about 10 grams of fat. Cutting out 100 calories from the diet every day could represent a 10-pound weight loss in a year!

Cookbook or a Subscription to a Cooking Magazine: Choose a cookbook with healthful recipes that are lower in sugar, fat and calories.

Other options include a cookbook that has only a few ingredients or one with recipes for quick meals. If the person enjoys receiving new recipe ideas throughout the year, give them a subscription to a cooking magazine.

Kitchen Tools: Here are some kitchen items that allow more cooking in less time.

Easy-To-Handle Gadgets: If someone on your gift list has weak hands or hands that are affected by arthritis, give them an assortment of large rubber-handled, easy-to-use kitchen tools, including: a vegetable peeler; grater; scissors; garlic press; can opener and ice cream scoop. Also available is a gadget that makes getting the lid off practically any jar as easy as pressing a button.

Spoonula: A heat-resistant, spoon-shaped spatula can take on many jobs of both a mixing spoon and a spatula. Look for a larger-sized one with a firm, flexible head. It should be strong enough to mix heavy batters yet flexible enough to conform to the contours of the mixing bowl.

Make sure the handle feels comfortable and is sturdy enough not to bend when mixing or scraping down the sides of the bowl. The spoonula should be dishwasher-safe and suitable for stirring in nonstick pans without scratching. The degree of heat resistance should be 400° F or higher so that the spoonula is suitable for stirring foods at the stove.

Extra Cutting Board: Every cook needs several cutting boards to save time that would be spent washing the board before cutting another item.

More importantly, having extra boards prevents cross-contamination when cutting different types of foods for the same meal. This is very critical when cutting raw meats, poultry or seafood followed by ready-to-eat foods such as salad items (e.g. raw vegetables and fruits).

Select a cutting board that is made of plastic or other non-porous material that won't dull knives and is dishwasher-safe.

Extra Set of Measuring Spoons: Buy an extra set of measuring spoons, or maybe two extra sets, so the cook on your gift list won't have to continually

wash and rewash that single set of spoons. Onion powder might taste great in the dip, but it doesn't go as well in the sugar cookies!

Universal Pan Lid: This lid fits a wide variety of pans and allows a person to visually check the cooking progress of food without lifting the lid, which releases heat and increases cooking time.

A universal lid usually has several rings of ridges that let it fit over different sizes of pans. Some brands cover pans from about 8" to 12" in diameter (as measured across the top of the pan), and other brands may offer both a smaller and a larger size lid. A few questions to ask about them are: Is it dishwasher-safe? Does it have a stay-cool knob? Is it oven-safe, and if so, to what temperature?

Hot Beverage Carafe: A pot of coffee or tea left on a heat source too long may develop an undesirable flavor (strong or bitter). Allowing the beverage to cool off then reheating it compromises or diminishes the flavor.

A carafe keeps beverages hot and fresh-tasting for hours. It is an ideal gift for someone who enjoys spending the morning with friends and family over coffee or tea, as well as for someone who drinks coffee or hot tea with their meal and wants a cup later with dessert. A carafe also is great for keeping hot chocolate warm for family and guests who straggle out of bed at different times.

Choose a carafe that is easy to use and clean. To keep beverages hot longer, preheat the carafe by filling it with hot water. Empty the water just prior to adding the beverage.

Pinch Bowls: These bowls hold just a "pinch" of this ingredient or a "dab" of that ingredient (e.g. herbs, spices, flavorings and eggs). They generally range in size from one to four ounces and are usually sold in sets of four to six bowls.

Pinch bowls are ideal for pre-measuring those small but mighty ingredients before mixing a recipe. These tools can save the day by preventing the cook from discovering too late that they don't have one of the essential ingredients. They also prevent dumping too much of an ingredient into a recipe, or forgetting that an ingredient has already been added.

Fitness-Related Gifts

For health benefits, the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that adults get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days, preferably every day. This activity time can be done all at once or broken up into shorter sessions, such as 15-minute intervals.

Getting 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity on most days will prevent weight gain, and 90 minutes will lead to weight loss, if the person does not consume more calories. Children and teens should be physically active for at least 60 minutes on most days, if not every day.

To rev up the physical activity level of people on your gift list, consider giving them one or more fitness-related items like these this year.

Pedometer: A recommended walking goal is to build up to an average of at least 10,000 steps a day. Why not buy a pedometer for someone else and get a duplicate for yourself? Then you can turn holiday shopping and cleaning into a step-a-thon. If you only want to count steps taken, then you can buy a pedometer that is ready to use right out of the box. Another type can be programmed to figure mileage.

Workout Video or DVD: These are available in levels from beginner to advanced, so choose the appropriate fitness level. The programs feature everything from kick boxing to pilates, salsa and tap dancing.

Popping a workout video into a home player is like having a personal trainer on call. You can work out to a dance video at home by yourself. This reduces the stress of whether your workout clothes measure up to someone else's or whether you'll step on your partner's toes. In fact, you can make up your own moves and don't even have to follow the steps. The important thing is to keep moving.

Stability or Balance Ball: There are several exercise routines that can be done on these balls. Through the continuous adjustment and readjustment of the body, core muscles can be

strengthened while sitting on the ball and watching TV. However, just bouncing up and down on it is a lot of fun and a great stress reliever. Always check the instructions on the box and buy the ball size that is correct for the person's height.

MP3 Player: This device is great for enjoying music or recorded books while taking a brisk walk or doing household chores to burn calories. Make sure you choose a player with enough memory to hold the number of songs, books, etc. for the intended use.

Three-Wheeled Adult Bike: This is an ideal gift for a senior who needs to exercise and get some fresh air. Since it is an expensive item, the entire family may need to pool together and buy it. Features to consider include a wide padded seat, rear cargo basket, and a foldable frame.

A New Cookbook: Are you wondering how a cookbook can be considered a fitness-related gift? When someone cooks, they stand up and move around, which burns more calories than passive activities done from a seated position. A 140-pound person burns about 80 calories during 30 minutes of cooking, according to "How Many Calories Did You Burn," an interactive tool on <http://www.webmd.com/>.

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