Heart-healthy eating this season

The holidays are coming. Tempting foods are everywhere. Many are not the best choices for the heart. These tips can help:

**Don’t take a break from fruits and veggies.** Fill half a plate with colorful fruits and veggies before moving on to other foods.

**Enjoy smaller portions.** People don’t have to go without pie. It’s a special treat — just have one small slice. Can’t go without gravy? Savor a small amount.

**Shake the sodium.** People can keep holiday meals low in sodium by comparing food labels when they shop.

Use fewer processed ingredients, like canned veggies or beans.

**Health care doesn’t take a holiday**

It can be easy to overlook medications, blood pressure checks, and doctor’s appointments at this time of year. People should do their best to stay on track — and reach out to their care manager or doctor if they have any questions or need help. Their doctor can refer them to a nutritionist for a more detailed holiday eating plan.

*Source: American Heart Association (www.heart.org)*

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A note about heart failure

Holiday foods can make symptoms worse for people who have congestive heart failure. Signs to watch for include:

- Shortness of breath.
- Swelling of the feet, ankles, legs or belly.
- Feeling extremely tired.
- Coughing or wheezing.
- Confusion or trouble remembering things.
- Gaining three or more pounds in one day.
- Nausea or lack of appetite.

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Contract services are funded under contract with AHCCCS. This is general health information and should not replace the advice or care you get from your provider. Always ask your provider about your own health care needs.

If you would no longer like to receive this mailing, please call Member Services and ask for the Care Management Department.

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**Contact us**

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Member Services: **602-263-3000** or **1-800-624-3879 (TTY: 711)**

Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

[www.MercyCareAZ.org](http://www.MercyCareAZ.org)

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How to make it through the holidays

The holidays can be stressful for the healthiest people. They can prove to be an even tougher time for people with a chronic illness.

People should keep in mind that they can opt out of any holiday events they don’t feel up to attending. It’s OK to say no. When they do take part, they can:

• Let someone else take on hosting duties.
• Plan in advance how they want to spend their time — and with whom.
• Take breaks from the social scene if they feel themselves running low on energy.
• Feeling tired? It’s OK to take a nap.
• Avoid alcohol. It can worsen bad moods or feelings.
• Take care of themselves by eating balanced meals.
• Give themselves permission to express their emotions. People shouldn’t try to force a happy face if they’re really feeling down.

• Try taking a walk when the sun’s out. Gray days can bring on seasonal affective disorder — a type of depression. Getting out in the sun can brighten their mood.
• Get plenty of rest so they have the energy for favorite events.

Keeping in touch

In the bustle of the holidays, people shouldn’t let their health fall by the wayside. Their primary care provider and care manager can answer their questions and point them to tools that make managing their health easier. Those include mobile apps to track blood pressure, cholesterol, medications, daily activity or calories. If people feel stressed or overwhelmed by their health, they should reach out. They’re not alone.

Sources: Alzheimer’s Association (www.alz.org); American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org); National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.nami.org)

Get the shot, not the flu

Just about everyone who’s 6 months of age or older needs a flu shot. That’s especially true for people with a chronic illness.

The best time to get a shot is before the flu starts spreading in your community. That’s hard to predict. It’s probably best to get the shot as soon as it’s available in your area.

Remember: You can’t get the flu from a shot. It’s among the best ways to avoid getting the flu.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov)

Caregivers: Seek the help you deserve

If you are a caregiver, ask your loved one’s care manager about their needed services as well as services you might need as a caregiver. For example, you may feel overwhelmed, sad or burned out. The care manager can provide information and referrals for support.