



YMCA

We build strong kids,  
strong families, strong communities.

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**YMCA OF THE USA OFFERS SIMPLE TIPS TO GIVE THE LIFETIME GIFT OF HEALTH AND WELL-BEING TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS THIS HOLIDAY SEASON**

*Long-term Health Risks for Obese Youth Increases Urgency for Helping Families Make their Holidays "Heart Healthy"*

CHICAGO, December 6, 2007 – A new study published this month in the New England Journal of Medicine indicates overweight and obesity in childhood and adolescence substantially increases future risk of heart disease and suggests the serious consequences of our nation's obesity epidemic are yet to come. YMCAs nationwide offer an integrated and holistic approach to health and well-being for children and parents that considers nutrition, relationships and physical activity to be a family matter. This holiday season, YMCA of the USA encourages families to give the gift of health to their loved ones and offers simple tips to make the holidays heart healthy.

"We know that millions of Americans, including children, face significant barriers to getting and staying healthy and active," said YMCA of the USA President and CEO Neil Nicoll. "The YMCA continues working to help communities, families and individuals make healthier choices, including education, healthy environments and relationships that support behavior change. In hundreds of communities across the country, YMCAs are helping adults, teens and youth overcome significant barriers to leading healthier, more active lives."

The holiday season is a perfect time to join with friends and family in making a commitment to a healthier way of living. Giving the gift of health this holiday season can make a lifetime difference in the way children grow into healthy adults—helping them to enjoy an active and balanced lifestyle before the consequences of obesity become irreversible.

YMCA of the USA offers the following ideas to help people incorporate healthy living into their holiday celebrations and gift giving and to help them be a source of encouragement to their friends and loved ones:

- Bring a healthy offering to potluck parties. A festive salad sprinkled with dried cranberries or cut vegetable tray will make a colorful addition to the buffet and give calorie-conscious party-goers a healthy alternative to sweets and heavy dishes.
- Create your own gift certificates offering healthy activities. Give a friend a certificate for a walk-a-week together; give a gift of babysitting so a family member or friend can enjoy an exercise class; stuff kids' stockings with gift cards for family bike rides, games of

catch. These gifts cost nothing but time and not only promote healthy activity but will strengthen family connections and bonds with friends.

- Turn on music after dinner and dance as a family; play musical chairs; have children make up routines and teach the adults the “new moves,” and have parents teach the children dance moves to music from when they were younger.
- While kids are home from school—and missing recess—design a family obstacle course. Stations might include hula hoop, jump rope, push ups, abdominal crunches, jumping jacks and wall sit. Set a timer and have the family move around to each station and perform the activity for 1 minute, increase the time by 30 seconds as the family begins to master each station.
- Offer entry fees to a fun run/walk to a friend or family member and plan to train together. Find an event a few months away to help stay motivated post New Year’s Resolutions. Wrap an empty frame for the finish line photo.
- Sign up the family or a group of friends for a healthy cooking night at a local cooking school or create your own version at home. You’ll enjoy the party atmosphere while learning healthy new recipes for the New Year.
- Give everyone on your list a pedometer and encourage them to keep track of their daily steps. Look forward to celebrating everyone’s steps as they increase their daily activity during the holiday season.
- Celebrate the spirit of the season by committing to volunteer as a family one evening a month, check out your local paper or YMCA for events or organizations in need of volunteers. Or make a walking program in your neighborhood for aging adults or people who live alone, volunteer to walk with them one evening or late afternoon a week.
- Incorporate physical activity into holiday activity planning. Turn a family walk with visiting relatives into a tradition before opening presents. Organize a neighborhood jingle bell jog to kick-off winter break. Find the neighborhood with the fantastic light displays; park and stroll instead of admiring from the car.

“The holiday season and beginning of a new year is a great time for American families to adopt new traditions and routines and get physically active,” said Nicoll. “The payoff is well worthwhile: a longer, healthier life and a stronger, happier family.”

For more tips, visit [www.ymca.net](http://www.ymca.net) and click on “Resources for Families.”

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### **The YMCA: A Long-Standing Commitment to Health of Spirit, Mind and Body**

YMCA of the USA is the national resource office for the nation’s 2,663 YMCAs, which serve nearly 20.2 million people each year, including 9.4 million children under the age of 18. Through a variety of programs and services focused on the holistic development of children and youth, health and well-being for all and family strengthening, YMCAs unite men, women and children of all ages, faiths, backgrounds, abilities and income levels. From urban areas to small towns, YMCAs have proudly served America’s communities for nearly 160 years by building healthy spirit, mind and body for all. Visit [www.ymca.net](http://www.ymca.net) to find your local YMCA.