

Holiday safety

For many, the holiday season is a time for celebrations and sharing gifts. While you're preparing for the holidays and ticking items off your wish list, remember that one of the best things you can bring home to your loved ones is the gift of safety.

Know the common holiday hazards

Just as you watch the dog so it doesn't sneak a taste of a celebratory dinner, watch out for other safety risks at home or while visiting family and friends this holiday season. From unexpected weather to outdoor decorating, this season holds risks in unexpected places. The more you understand and prepare for these dangers, the safer the holidays will be for you and your loved ones.

Use these tips to stay safe this holiday season

Keep common holiday hazards out of reach:

- Poisonous plants, such as amaryllis, should be placed out of reach of children and pets – poinsettias are also poisonous, but are actually less toxic to animals than aloe!
- Place candles on a stable surface and away from anything that can catch fire, such as curtains and napkins
- Place trees and wreaths away from fireplaces, radiators and other heat sources

Decorate safely:

- Check holiday and tree lights for fraying, bare spots, gaps in the insulation or excessive kinking in the wire to avoid fire risks
- Keep extension cords out of walkways and never overload them – if your extension cord isn't quite long enough, find a longer one instead of adding a second extension cord
- Turn off all lights and decorations when not in use
- If you put up a tree this season, make sure it has a stable platform and keep it well watered; if using an artificial tree, make sure it is labeled fire resistant
- Prevent falls when putting up decorations by using a locking step stool or ladder to reach high places

Plan ahead:

- Always designate a sober driver when attending an event and, if hosting, make sure your guests do the same
- Practice food safety when preparing meals: always wash your hands, utensils, sink and anything else that touches raw meat
- Refrigerate leftovers as soon as possible and reheat them to at least 165° F (74° C) before eating

Everyone celebrates differently, so think through your own holiday traditions to find where the hazards are hiding. The holidays are busy enough, so planning for these dangers can help ensure a safe season.

Prioritize yourself and your mental health

Take proactive steps to stay healthy during this stressful season. Use these tips to take care of yourself so you can enjoy the holidays:

- Watch for signs of mental distress, from changes in appetite or sleep patterns to feelings of being drained or lonely
- Practice physical self-care over the holidays by eating healthy, getting regular exercise and aiming for 7-9 hours of sleep each day
- Take regular breaks from the news and social media, and lean on your support systems when needed

The stress of the holidays can feel overwhelming even as the celebrations continue. These added pressures and distractions can negatively impact every part of your life, from your mental health to your work and even your focus behind the wheel. If you aren't feeling like yourself, don't ignore it; reach out to your supervisor, Human Resources rep, health care provider or Employee Assistance Program for additional help.

Prioritizing yourself comes first, but it's important to watch out for others, too. Have a plan if a family member or loved one – especially someone who has struggled in the past – shows signs of mental distress.

Safety tips for holiday hosts

If you plan on hosting your loved ones this season, use these additional tips to prepare your home:

- Clear outdoor walkways of snow and ice, debris, and other slipping hazards before guests arrive
- Mark any uneven walkways that would need to be navigated in low light
- Store prescription drugs, especially opioids, away and out of sight where guests can't access them
- Check your fire extinguisher and the batteries in your smoke alarms – and replace any that are out of date or not working properly
- Talk to your guests about your home fire escape plan so everyone is prepared in an emergency

