

Keeping your health and well-being in the know

MyHealthTALK

December 2010

Christmas Tree and Light Safety

Christmas trees and lights can be a major fire hazard. Follow the tips below to reduce the risk of injury and damage, and enjoy a safe and happy holiday season.

1. Turn off lights when asleep or away from home.
2. Never use indoor extension cords or indoor lights for outside lighting.
3. No more than three sets of lights should be connected together unless directions indicate that it is safe to do so.
4. Unplug light strings before changing bulbs. Replace bulbs with same wattage bulbs.
5. Check all lights for damage and throw out damaged sets.
6. Always read product safety labels before product use.
7. Needles on freshly cut trees should be green and hard to pull back from the branches, and the trunk should be sticky to the touch. If you bounce the tree trunk on the ground and too many needles fall off, it is a sign that it has dried out and is a fire hazard.
8. Both real and artificial trees should not be placed close to a heat source, including heat vents and fireplaces.
9. As a general rule, stands should provide 1 quart of water per inch of stem diameter. Ensure water never goes below base of trunk.
10. Use a stand that fits your tree. Avoid whittling the sides of the trunk down to fit a stand. The outer layers of wood are the most efficient in taking up water and should not be removed.

Sources cited:
National Christmas Tree Association
Dr. Gary Chastagner and Dr. Eric Hinesley
The Scientific Research Committee of the National Christmas Tree Association

Pay it Forward this Holiday Season

Giving back to your community is very important. While this is brought to the forefront more during the holiday season, it is very important all year long.

There are many different populations of people that can use additional assistance from community members. Whether you are helping those in need of food or shelter, senior citizens, special needs children, or someone who is ill, there is always something you can do.

Start by choosing something that holds special interest for you. If you would like to assist a needy family, contact your church or local school for some information. You can contact your local Senior Center or a nearby nursing home to determine how you can best help out a senior citizen. You don't have to necessarily donate monetarily; you can donate your time. A senior may need help with yard work, home repairs, or a ride to the grocery store. They may also enjoy a visitor to come sit and talk for a short time.

This is a great opportunity to get your whole family involved. Young children and teens can easily be included in the experience. There is no limit to what you can do, start today!

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Volunteer at a youth club.
- Make birthday cards or holiday cards for the elderly.
- Donate a blanket or coat to the homeless. These can be gently used or new.
- Rake leaves for an elderly neighbor.
- Make a pot of soup and deliver it to someone recovering from surgery. This can be a friend or someone whose name you obtain through your community or place of worship.
- Donate new or gently used professional clothing to a women's shelter.
- Contact your local school for the names of children that can benefit from tutoring. Choose one and set up a weekly tutoring session.
- Serve a meal at a shelter or donate your time at a food bank.

Healthy Holiday Eating

Here are some tips to help you eat healthy and to maintain your weight during all the Holiday parties.

1 Never go to a party on an empty stomach, eat a piece of fruit or a low fat snack before you leave.

2 Do not stand around the buffet table.

3 Choose pretzels and low fat snack mixes in place of potato chips.

When baking, keep your mouth occupied with some sugar free gum or sip tea to keep you from sampling while you cook.

4 **5** Prepare food on a full stomach. This will help keep you from sampling what you are making.

7 Use plain yogurt in place of sour cream in dips and on baked potatoes, skip the candied sweet potatoes.

6 Limit the amount of alcohol you drink, each drink should be followed with a glass of water.

8 Order mixers with diet or club soda.

Cook stuffing outside the turkey, it contains fewer calories and fat than stuffing cooked in the turkey.

9

11

Serve steamed vegetables with lemon juice and herbs or light margarine.

10

Choose white meat without the skin instead of dark meat and meat with the skin.

12

Eat slowly to savor the flavor. This will help reduce your chances of overeating.

13

Make socializing your top priority. Talking with friends and family will help keep you from snacking.

14 Maintain your exercise routine.



Year End Checklist

As we approach the end of 2010, below is a checklist of a few items that may need your attention before the end of the year:

- Review your benefits to be informed of any deadlines and/or forms that may need to be submitted prior to the end of the year. Many benefit offerings do not automatically carry over to the following year and re-enrollment maybe needed for 2011.
- Take advantage of any met deductibles and annual visit limits such as dental and vision exams as you get closer to the end of the year. Make your year-end doctor appointments as applicable.
- If you have a Flexible Spending Account, submit claims to use your 2010 funds. You may have a grace period to submit your claims in 2011, but remember, the services will have to be incurred in 2010 or any unused funds will be forfeited. With the over-the-counter pharmacy rules changing in 2011, this is a good opportunity to use any remaining funds.
- If you have a Dependent Care Account, submit claims to use your 2010 funds. You may have a grace period to submit your claims in 2011, but remember, the services will have to be incurred in 2010 or any unused funds will be forfeited.
- Check your address in the payroll system for accuracy. The W-2 forms are typically sent to that address.
- Schedule your remaining 2010 paid time off (PTO) as you may lose it at the end of the year.