

Keeping your health and wellbeing in the know

## YOUR DIY HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

The holiday season can be a wonderful time of year, but sometimes gift giving can become overwhelming. In the spirit of keeping this year's gifts economical, here is a list of healthy holiday gift ideas you can make yourself. Homemade gifts are a practical and personal way to show loved ones how special they are to you.



### Curried Sweet Potato Purée

Try this dairy-free side dish for the holidays. The sweet potatoes are balanced with the heat from ginger and curry, and some lime adds a bright kick at the end!

#### Preparation

1. Preheat the oven to 400 F. Wrap **4 medium sweet potatoes (about 1 ¾ pounds)** in foil, place on a baking sheet and bake for one hour or until soft. Let them cool slightly.
2. Combine **½ cup unsweetened almond milk**, **½ teaspoon curry powder** and **4 thin slices peeled fresh ginger** in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil, lower the heat and simmer until the mixture is reduced by one third (about five minutes). Discard the ginger.
3. Pour any sugary juices from the sweet potato foil wrappers into a food processor. Peel the sweet potatoes and add the flesh to the food processor. Add the almond milk mixture and if desired, **½ teaspoon kosher salt**, and purée until smooth.
4. Transfer to a serving bowl and squeeze **½ lime** over the finished purée. Garnish with the **chopped walnuts** and **chopped cilantro** if desired and serve warm.

Serves: 4  
(Adapted from foodnetwork.com)

#### RELAXATION KIT:

Since the holidays can be stressful, put together a relaxation kit for someone special. You can include candles, some incense, essential oils and/or a CD with soothing music.



#### SUGAR SCRUB:

Make your own with coconut oil, peppermint (or another essential oil) and granular sugar. Place the finished product in a glass jar, tie with a bow and voilà – you have a sweet holiday gift that's ready to go.



#### HANDWRITTEN RECIPES:

Put together your favorite tried and true healthy recipes in a book and gift them to a foodie family member.

**PLANT IN A MUG:** Choose a mug you want to repurpose and plant an herb inside, like rosemary or basil, or even a succulent. It's a gift that keeps on giving – desk décor now, tea mug later.



#### KNIT ITEMS:

If you've got the knack for knitting, try making a cozy, homemade scarf or blanket as a gift. The receiver will adore it and think of you every time they wrap up.



#### MUFFIN MIX:

Upcycle a mason jar and put together a basic premade healthy muffin mix with all the dry ingredients included. Then, all your loved one will have to do is add the wet ingredients and their flavors of choice.

#### HOMEMADE PET TREATS:

For your friends who love their furbaby, bake some all-natural treats for dogs or cats.



"58 Christmas Gifts Your Friends and Family Will Love,"  
Country Living Staff, countryliving.com, Oct. 11, 2016.

# EXCESS STRESS

## MAY AFFECT HOW OUR BODIES DIGEST HEALTHY FOOD

Rampant stress can wreak havoc in our bodies. In surplus, stress has been known to facilitate internal changes that can sometimes lead to illness. But a recent, small, exploratory study suggests stress can also impact healthy eating.

Published in the *Journal of Molecular Psychiatry*, the study prompted 58 women to evaluate their stress from the past 24 hours as well as any recent symptoms of depression they may have experienced. The participants then ate a meal high or low in saturated fat.

Through blood testing, the researchers were able to track common markers for inflammation in response to the food. Those who reported low levels of stress tended to have inflammatory responses to the food high in saturated fat only, which was expected. However, those who reported high levels of stress tended to have inflammation after both meals, even the healthier option. The findings caught researchers by surprise and they hope this study will lead to more exploratory research into how stress might play a role in metabolism.

“Stress May Counteract Effects of a Healthful Diet,”  
Nicholas Bakalar, nytimes.com, Sept. 22, 2016.



## DAILY STRESS CHECK

Managing stress each day is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. Just as each of us is wildly unique, our approaches to stress relief are also very personalized – find what methods work best for you. Here are some ideas to help you get started:

- ✓ **Prioritize relaxation.** Relaxing activities are not restricted to resting on the couch; hobbies most certainly fall in this category.
- ✓ **Get quality rest.** Sleeping seven to nine hours each night can help support your body as it manages influxes of stress throughout the day.
- ✓ **Explore routine stress-reduction practices.** Meditation and mindfulness are lifelong tools that can help you relax, even in the middle of stressful situations.
- ✓ **Find time for regular physical activity.** Get moving for at least 30 minutes each day.
- ✓ **Focus on the many relationships in your life.** Create memories with loved ones.
- ✓ **Maintain a healthy, balanced diet.** You might even add foods with vitamin C (oranges), magnesium (spinach), whole grains and more to your healthy diet to help buffer the impact of stress on your body.

## Exercise to **STAY ENERGIZED** This Holiday Season

Between indulgent holiday meals and scrumptious sweets galore, it can be challenging to keep holiday weight gain at bay. Even though this season can be a flurry of parties, shopping, family gatherings and commitments, you're never too busy to exercise. If you only have time for a few reps of your favorite move, it's better than nothing. The following ideas can help you fit in physical activity if you're in a pinch.



- Perform this seven-minute workout one or more times a day by doing the following exercises at a rigorous pace for 30 seconds and resting 10 seconds between movements: jumping jacks, wall sit, pushups, abdominal crunches, chair step-ups, squats, triceps dips, plank, high knees, lunges, pushups with rotation and side plank.
- Jump rope for 1,000 repetitions.
- Do 50 glute bridges.
- Hold the plank position for a minute or two.
- Do 25 pushups (using any modification necessary).
- Hold a wall sit or perform lunges and squats while talking on the phone.
- Tackle 20 to 50 burpees.
- Flow through a quick yoga sequence.
- Take a walk or run around the block.

"The Scientific 7-Minute Workout," Gretchen Reynolds, nytimes.com, May 9, 2013.