

Fun Fact of the Week

10 Ways to Burn Off Holiday Calories

Fall and winter activities can help you balance out those holiday feasts*

By Wendy C. Fries

Sage butter-basted turkey. Hazelnut praline and chocolate chunk torte. White cheddar and red pepper biscuits.

Does it seem like just *reading the names* of your favorite holiday fare causes the pounds to arrive like unwelcome gifts? Even with the best intentions, the holidays cause many of us to eat a little too much, or to miss a few too many workouts.



So, WebMD turned to health and fitness pros for holiday help. These experts gave us some of their simple tips on how -- between travel, parties, cooking, and company -- we can burn off some of those celebratory calories.

1. Do Your Home Work

The scenario: A festive cookie exchange at the office causes you to miss your [yoga](#) class, company's coming tonight, and the house is a mess.

Lucky you! "Housework is the best way to fit in a [workout](#) without even knowing it," says Shannon Griffiths, group fitness director for Lakeshore Athletic Club in Boulder, Colo. Scrubbing, sweeping, vacuuming ... they all burn calories.

Even cooking fires up the calorie furnace, says Griffiths, especially if you're moving around the kitchen. So put on perky music and boogie down while you bake.

2. Shop Until You Drop -- Pounds!

"I like to use shopping as exercise, too," says Griffiths, who maintains that the best thing about going to the mall is all the walking. "That translates into a calorie burn."

To maximize that burn, Griffith recommends carrying your own holiday packages, then unloading them after every stop. "If you're going to buy something at 10 different shops, go out to your car between each store," Griffiths says.

To encourage yourself to make those multiple trips to the parking lot or to take the mall stairs instead of elevators, Griffiths recommends wearing a pedometer. "A pedometer really encourages you to ... get moving," she says. "You have to go shopping, so you might as well get a workout as you're doing it!" Keep your pace brisk and you can burn 250-300 calories an hour.

3. Make Snow Your Ally

When it's snowing, it's time to bundle up and enjoy the free gym outside.

"The best calorie-burners are those that bring the [heart rate](#) up to a cardiovascular training zone," says Julia C. Jackson, owner of Friends in Fitness Corporate Wellness and Personal Training in California. For most healthy people, the American [Heart](#) Association recommends an exercise target heart rate ranging from 50% to 75% of your maximum heart rate, which is normally calculated as the number 220 minus your age.

Jackson advocates snowshoeing as a great way to get into that range. "Snowshoeing is fantastic," Jackson says, "because absolutely anyone who can walk can snowshoe." The big bonus: you'll blaze through some 563 calories an hour doing it. And don't forget cross-country skiing, which Jackson says offers "a complete body workout," building balance and coordination while burning about 650 calories an hour.

Prefer other winter sports? Downhill skiing flies through 352 calories an hour, while ice-skating glides through 493 calories an hour.

4. Get on the Ball

When it's too cold to be outside, get bouncy inside -- and strengthen your core muscles -- with exercise balls, recommends Fabio Comana, an exercise physiologist with the American Council on Exercise in San Diego. Exercise balls, also known as fitness balls and balance balls, are large vinyl balls in various diameters ranging from 18 inches to 3 feet.

Your workout with an exercise ball can be as easy -- and fun -- as sitting on the ball and bouncing lightly to gently work your core muscles (the muscles surrounding your trunk and pelvis). A ball workout can also be pulse-pounding, if you use your ball as a prop for crunches, pushups, leg lifts, or squats.

Too pooped to prop? You can even burn a few calories simply sitting on the ball and working to maintain your balance.

5. Walking Is a Winner

For most of us, walking is the easiest way to burn a few extra calories during busy times. The trick (after a good warm-up) is to keep your pace strong, says Diane Proud, a running pro at the Cooper Fitness Center in Dallas. Try [power walking](#), high-stepping, or climbing stadium stairs. According to Proud, such activities fire up major muscle groups like the quads and gluteals. "Recruiting more muscle fibers during a workout is like stoking a fire ... the embers burn for a longer period," she says.

That means even when you're lounging by the fire later, you'll still be burning away extra calories. If you keep up a moderate walking pace, expect to burn 250-300 calories hourly.

6. Do a Good Deed

Combine a few of our calorie-burning tips -- shopping, cooking, walking -- and do a good deed in the process. You can gently increase holiday season activity, says Comana, by making goodies for your neighbors, then taking a brisk stroll around the neighborhood to drop off your homemade gifts.

Or burn about 700 calories an hour participating in a holiday fund-raising race, such as the [Arthritis](#) Foundation's Jingle Bell Run/Walk for [Arthritis](#), held in various U.S. cities in December.

Locate all kinds of races near you at www.coolrunning.com. Good deeds *and* a good body -- what a gift!

7. Travel Your Way Trim

When the temptations at home are just too great, escape them by getting away for the holidays, suggests Diane V. Dillard, a home health professional in Port Richey, Fla.: "Get away for a ski trip, go ice-skating -- go do the things you're always wanting to do anyway."

Even getting from here to there provides opportunities to burn calories, says Griffiths.

"If you have to travel, be sure to wheel your own bags, only take what you can carry on, and lift the bags yourself," says Griffiths.

And don't forget to walk, walk, walk. Walk between terminals, take the stairs, stroll between gates while you wait. "Even if you're on the moving walkway -- walk!" Griffiths says.

8. Sit Tight and Work Out

Every holiday includes downtime when family or friends gather around the television for a parade, a game, or a favorite old movie. Why not use that time to burn a few calories?

"Instead of sitting with your full butt on the couch, get to the end of your seat and bend your legs up off the floor, hands on the seat to give you balance, and do crunches," says Nieca Goldberg, MD, chief of Women's Cardiac Care at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York.

Goldberg also recommends getting your triceps trim by doing dips off the edge of the couch (or airport seat), firming your thighs with seated leg lifts, and building [biceps](#) by grabbing a water bottle and doing curls. A workout in your comfy chair? *It's a Wonderful Life* indeed!

9. Maximize Motivation With More People

To keep her motivation at peak, Griffiths gets fired up with group fitness classes. "Being in a group can really help motivate you," she says. Gyms and rec centers offer all kinds of classes to choose from, from yoga and [aerobics](#) to ballet, kickboxing, aquacising, and [Pilates](#).

Want something more free-form? Get a group of friends and family to join you outside for an hour of making snow angels, sledding, searching for the last colorful leaves, hiking, or ice-skating.

A bonus: Workouts with loved ones not only keep everyone's calorie counts in check, but exercising together can help build stronger [relationships](#), too.

10. Here's a bonus holiday fitness tip:

Just set a goal. Having a specific objective is a great way to motivate yourself, Griffiths says. Share your plan and goals with your primary care doctor. "[Set goals](#) for how many workouts you want to get in during the week," Griffith says.

Even if it's fewer than you usually do during the rest of the year, be sure to reward yourself for meeting your objectives.

So How Much Exercise Do You Need?

Instead of tackling a [weight loss](#) regimen over the holidays, most experts suggest you simply aim for maintenance.

To stay in a steady [weight](#) state, get 30 minutes of moderate activity daily, says Jenny Graddy, coordinator of group fitness and wellness at University of Florida Recreational Sports in Gainesville, Fla. You can rack up that 30 minutes throughout the day, Graddy stresses. Go for a 10-minute walk in the morning, play actively with your kids in the afternoon, then walk the dog before dinner, and you're there.

With the holiday hustle and bustle upon us, Griffiths reminds us that staying fit during this time is not as hard as you may think.

"Folks think they have to suffer to get fit, but they don't," she says. "They just have to get up and move!"

* <https://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/features/10-ways-to-burn-off-holiday-calories#1>