The holidays will be upon us before we know it. Unfortunately for many, Thanksgiving signals the opening day of a season of overeating, stress and inactivity. The season does not end until we ring in the New Year. For many people this also means unwanted weight gain. It does not have to be this way. For help in maneuvering the holiday season consider these tips from the Eat Smart, Move More North Carolina Holiday Challenge:

- If you have been trying to lose weight before the holidays, it is especially hard to continue to do so once they arrive. Therefore, the challenge is to try to maintain weight and not gain any during the weeks from Thanksgiving until after the first of the year. Once January arrives you can get back on track, if you have more weight to lose.
- Make a plan. Once you know the times when your big family meals will be served, build some activity into the day. It is better to schedule activity time before the meal, just in case things do not go as expected. Involving all family members in playing a game in the yard, or having everyone go on a walk around the neighborhood. Be sure to provide relief time in the kitchen so the cook can get physical activity, too.
- Eat breakfast. It is not a good idea to skip breakfast on a holiday. Trying to save up calories in anticipation of a big meal can backfire by leaving you so hungry by the time the meal is served that you eat twice as much. Eat a light breakfast and even a small snack before the big meal to avoid becoming ravenous.
- Survey the scene. Before putting food on your plate, survey all the food choices that are being offered. You may not want to fill your plate with the first thing you see if there is something you prefer at the other end of the table. The tendency might be to eat everything on your plate if you do this, realizing later that you ate too much.
- Start with a salad. Eat foods with the lowest number of calories first, such as salads with low-fat dressings, or broth soups, steamed veggies and lean meats. Then you may be too full to overindulge in the more calorie-laden dishes.
- Choose your sauces wisely. Many holiday foods end up swimming in gravy and rich sauces. This adds extra calories quickly. Exercise moderation when ladling gravy or serving sauces.
- Practice portion control. It may be tempting to eat several big pieces of meat smothered in gravy and mashed potatoes. But the serving size for a portion of meat is the size of a deck of playing cards and for mashed potatoes a serving is half a cup.
- Avoid second story pitfalls. It is hard to resist taking a little of everything. But sometimes this means that by the time you get to the end of the buffet line you have a second or third layer of food on your plate. Be picky, only take portions of what you really enjoy and then no more than a single layer.
- Choose only one dessert. It is not necessary to deny yourself dessert every time, but take only a small piece of a dessert when you do have it. Small samples of several desserts could actually be the equivalent of one giant piece of a single item. You might be consuming more calories than you realize.

For more tips and information about healthy holiday habits including recipes and physical activity suggestions, visit www.eatsmartmovemoreNC.com. Sign up for the Holiday Challenge and receive weekly newsletters to help you “maintain, and not gain.”
Green Holiday Décor

Give old, outdated holiday decorations a new life for the season. Strip old material from an existing base of grapevine, straw or wire. Use fresh greens of holly, juniper, cedar, pine, hemlock, magnolia, arborvitae, nandina, ivy, and boxwood cuttings. Add color and interest with items that you have on hand like fresh fruit, silk fruit, cones, glass ornaments or plant clippings from your yard. Recycle and reuse oasis, floral foam, grapevine wreath, straw wreath, wire wreath, containers, candles, ribbons and wrapping paper.

Keep Product Packaging and Receipts for Rebate Savvy

A rebate is cash given to the consumer as an incentive to buy a particular model, make or brand of product. While many people have not received a promised rebate or they feel the process of requesting the rebate is too much of a hassle, savvy shoppers know that many of the best deals involve purchases that include a rebate. Rebates can be financially sensible for the consumer, but attention to details helps the process go smoothly.

Follow these tips for rebate success:

- Carefully follow directions to meet the terms of the agreement and to avoid disqualification.
- Make sure all needed items are saved to properly redeem the rebate. A rebate application may require the Universal Product Code (UPC) code from the original packaging. Do not throw product packaging away until you have submitted the rebate request.
- Keep all receipts for items submitted for rebates. Many companies require an original receipt or a proof of purchase. Read the fine print of the rebate terms carefully.
- Make a copy of all paperwork when applying for a rebate. The copies are the only record you have if problems arise.
- Send in the rebate request and required documentation as soon as possible. All offers have expiration dates. Many companies allow only a small window of time for you to send in the documentation.
- Enclose all required documentation including UPC codes or receipts in the same envelope unless you are asked to submit each one separately.
- Consider using certified mail, and keep the certified mail receipt.
- Keep a record of the dates the manufacturer promised to send your rebate check. Contact the company if the rebate does not arrive within the time promised. Most companies have Web sites and toll-free 800 numbers for your use.
- Keep a record of all communications in association with the rebate.

Go Green for the Holidays

For an economical and environmentally friendly way to celebrate during the holiday season go green. The holiday season provides many opportunities to help sustain the environment. For example, reuse decorating and gift wrapping, choose items made of natural products, use plant material from your garden or landscape, and use live plants that can be planted following the holiday.

Look for products made of natural fibers like organically grown cotton and wool, or products made from recycled materials. When purchasing new items try to stay local and buy products manufactured within 500 miles or less. If a product was manufactured in places across the globe, a lot more energy was used getting it to your house than something made near your home. Thrift shop purchases and antique items are also considered green.

Gifts of Time

- Homemade, heart-healthy dinner, delivered to recipient on a designated day.
- A monthly lunch date with an elderly relative or friend.
- Family nature outing: full moon walk or a winter picnic.
- Organize an outing to a museum or park.
- Prepare a spring garden and plant seeds for someone unable to do so.
- Coupons stating a 30-minute walk together several days per week.

Gifts for the Family

- Plant a fruit tree.
- Coupon for a bowling or ice skating night.
- Equipment to help family be more physically active, such as a basketball/hoop, walking shoes, table tennis.
- Personalized basket filled with fresh fruit and nuts.

Gifts for the Individual

- Gym or Y membership: three months, six months or one year.
- Subscription for a health-promoting publication addressing healthy eating or physical activity.
- A pair of walking or running shoes.
- Gift certificate for a massage.
- Yoga or Pilates video and a floor mat.

Gifts for Everyone

- Pedometer.
- Hand-held weights or stretch bands.
- Exercise video or CD.
- Age-appropriate books promoting healthy lifestyle.
- Blank journal or diary.
- Food preparation tools like a zester or vegetable peeler.
- Healthy recipe with ingredients.
- Reusable water bottle.
Medicare Preventive Services And Personal Medicare Information

Medicare can do more for you than simply help you cover the costs of doctor and hospital bills. Medicare’s preventive benefits can help you stay one step ahead of serious illnesses or certain chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Early detection tests can find health problems early when treatment works best. These services include exams, lab tests, and screenings. Also included are shots, monitoring and information to help you take care of your own health. Medicare pays for many preventive services.

Medicare’s preventive services are covered regardless of the kind of Medicare health; however, the amount you pay for these services varies depending on the type of health plan. Preventive services are covered if you have Part B under the Original Medicare Plan. If you have another type of Medicare health plan, such as a Medicare Advantage plan, call your plan for more information.

Medicare covers the following preventive services: flu shot, pneumonia shot, cardiovascular screenings, colorectal cancer screenings, “welcome to Medicare” physical exam, diabetes screening, diabetes self-management training, medical nutritional therapy services, bone mass measurement, hepatitis B shots, glaucoma test, smoking cessation program, mammogram breast cancer screening, Pap test and pelvic exam cancer screenings, and prostate cancer screening.

Sign up at www.MyMedicare.gov to track the preventive benefits you have used each year and to help you remember the benefits for which you are eligible. Visit http://gingrey.house.gov/UploadedFiles/Medicare_services.pdf for the “Guide to Medicare’s Preventive Services.” Or you can call the Seniors’ Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP) at 1-800-546-5664 and request the brochure, “A Healthier US Starts Here: Welcome to the First Day of a Healthier Life.” Medicare now has a secure online service that allows beneficiaries to access their information 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Make the most of your Medicare coverage by logging on today and accessing your personal Medicare information. To register, log on to www.MyMedicare.gov and click on the link labeled “Need to Register” in the middle of the page. Enter your Medicare number located on your Medicare card to fill out the required information. To submit your information, click on the “Continue” button. If you provide an e-mail address when you register, your password will be emailed to you right away. Otherwise, Medicare will mail you a password within two weeks. Once you have your password, log onto www.MyMedicare.gov to access your personal information.

This online tool allows you to:
- Follow claims status (excluding Part D claims);
- Order duplicate Medicare summary notices or a replacement Medicare card;
- View eligibility, entitlement and preventive services information;
- View enrollment information, including prescription drug plans;
- View or modify your drug list and pharmacy information;
- View address of record with Medicare and Part B deductible status; and
- Access forms and publications online.

If you have questions about the Web site, call MyMedicare’s technical support hotline at 1-877-607-9663 for help. Or call SHIIP for help with your MyMedicare.gov account at 1-800-443-9354.

Kinship Caregiving

Kinship caregiving is a temporary or permanent full-time arrangement by which a relative or non-relative adult cares for a child in the place of the child’s parents. Kinship caregiving provides a minor (child under the age of 18) with a secure family environment including affection and familiarity.

Kinship care arrangements often occur because a child’s parent or parents are unable to provide and nurture their child due to the parent’s death, incarceration, divorce, domestic violence, poverty, unemployment or drug abuse. Kinship care includes relationships established through informal arrangements, legal custody or guardianship, foster care placement or kinship adoption.

The 2000 census recognized one in 12, or six million children across the country were in kinship relationships. That number continues to rise. Grandparents are the largest group of kinship caregivers.

When biological parents are unable or not willing to assume parental responsibilities, serious disruption of the family typically results. Kinship care can place financial burdens on the caregiver and caregiver’s family. For grandparents who are retired and living on fixed incomes, the economic hardships can be overwhelming. Kinship caregivers need support and access to resources in different ways than parents. Federal, state and local legislators and policy makers, child advocacy organizations, intergenerational groups, and agencies addressing the needs of older adult caregivers are increasingly recognizing this growing need and are developing supportive services and financial aid opportunities to kinship caregivers.

For more information, contact your local Department of Social Services or go to www.grandfactsheets.org/doc/NorthCarolina%20Templat.pdf.
Many great vegetables are available this time of year. Roasting is a great, simple way to prepare many different vegetables, especially those that are plentiful during the fall and winter. Vegetables harvested during the summer months tend to be less starchy and contain more water making them less well suited to roasting. Roasting not only enhances the flavor of starchy vegetables, but also adds interest in terms of color and crisp textures. With only a touch of oil to prevent the vegetables from sticking to the bottom of the pan, roasted vegetables are a nutritious way to get part of the eight to ten servings of fruits and vegetables that are recommended by health professionals.

Roasting vegetables is easy. Select the vegetables. Cut them into the appropriate size. sprinkle with salt, pepper, and a drizzle of olive oil. Put them into a preheated hot oven. Add fresh herbs and garlic, if desired, during the last 15 minutes of cooking.

Fall vegetables that roast well include beets, brussels sprouts, broccoli, carrots, pumpkin, onions, peppers, mushrooms, sweet potatoes, rutabaga, turnip, and a variety of winter squash. Winter vegetables suitable for roasting include sweet potatoes, carrots, potatoes, winter squash, endive, turnips, and rutabaga.

As the vegetables roast, much of the water inside the vegetable evaporates, concentrating the flavors and caramelizing the natural sugars. The finished food is golden with a slightly crisp exterior and tender moist interior.

**Tips for delicious roasted vegetables:**

- **Hot, dry heat is crucial.** An oven temperature of 450°F is especially important during the first 15 minutes of roasting. If further cooking is necessary, reduce the oven temperature to 375 to 400°F so that cooking continues without too much browning. Roast until tender and lightly browned.
- **Place vegetables in a single layer.** Use a roasting pan with low sides that will hold the vegetables in one layer.
- **Don’t stir the vegetables in the first 10 to 15 minutes of cooking.** After the vegetables are well seared, gently shake the pan to help them to brown evenly.
- **Add garlic and other herbs during the last 15 minutes to avoid burning and development of bitter flavors.**