

STAYING SAFE DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holiday season is here and you may be wondering whether to have or attend gatherings. Clearly, the risk of COVID-19 is making this season different than any other.

Does this mean you have to forego parties or is it possible to attend safely?

The Centers for Disease Control have laid out some recommendations for minimizing risk if you do choose to gather with people who don't already live in your household.

Gather outdoors: If the weather permits, outdoor gatherings are safer than indoor ones. The coronavirus spreads much more easily inside, especially if there is poor ventilation. Being outdoors can make it easier to maintain a safe distance and there is more airflow.

Look at rates in your area: Consider the rates of COVID cases in your local area and/or the areas of the people with whom you're considering getting together. It's a good idea to avoid hosting people that may be coming from areas with high transmission.

Limit the duration of get-togethers: The less time you spend with people who may have the virus, the lower the risk of getting it. Remember, people can be infected and be asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic.

Limit the number of people who attend: The larger the crowd, the greater the risk. Experts have suggested limiting gatherings to no more than 10 people. This also allows for more physical distancing.

Assess the behavior of your guests: Ask your guests if they've been following the recommended precautions in the weeks leading up to the gathering. It's important to know if they've been around large groups of people and how consistently they wear masks.

Wear your masks: Even with all of the previous precautions, it's still necessary to wear masks during gatherings, other than while eating. Be sure to put the mask back on after eating or drinking. It may be a good idea to keep alcoholic beverages to a minimum since drinking may lead to people letting their guards down.

Wash hands frequently: Have soap and water and/or hand sanitizer available to ensure frequent handwashing and be sure to sanitize high touch areas often.

Of course, if the risk still feels too great or you can't ensure that the people hosting will follow these precautions, it's okay to decline invitations. And, you can always connect over video chat with loved ones.

THE BENEFITS OF RESISTANCE BANDS

It's likely that your gym is still closed or if it reopened, you might not be willing to take the risk of returning, especially during this time when COVID cases are spiking again.

Want a practical way to get an effective workout at home without machines? Try using resistance bands.

Here's how it can help manage stress:

- Stress causes tension in the body, which can contribute to headaches, neck or back pain, tightness in the jaw, & more. Exercise can help release this tension & relax the body.
- Exercise has been shown to reduce depression & anxiety by reducing stress hormones and stimulating the production of endorphins, hormones that elevate mood.
- Aerobic exercise has the ability to stimulate, yet calm you down too.
- Exercise can also help you feel a sense of mastery, control, pride, & self-confidence.

Types:

Sheet bands: These are thin sheets of latex that are often used in physical therapy. They're versatile, but provide less resistance than other types.

Mini loop bands: These fit around the legs & are helpful for enhancing leg, hips & glute workouts.

Traditional loop bands: These work for both lower & upper body exercises. They are considered the most versatile since they can be used with or without anchors.

Tube bands: These are made from hard rubber & are used with handles. They are usually used with a door anchor.

What to look for:

- Choose a pack that includes a variety of resistance levels since different muscle groups will require different levels of resistance.
- To determine which band to use, perform a few exercises with different bands to find the one you can stretch completely to the end of a move.

How to use:

- Once you're able to do 10 repetitions with your starting band, increase to 15 reps.
- Once that becomes too easy, move to the next level band.
- Be aware that your lower body may progress from one band to the next faster than your upper body since the lower body has larger & stronger muscles.

Pistachio Pomegranate Bark

4 Servings

This tasty, hearty and healthy casserole is great for a group or as a meal prep. Take it to a get-together or make it for dinner and have enough left for lunch.

Ingredients

- 7-8 ounces dark chocolate (at least 70% cacao)
- 1 cup pomegranate seeds
- ½ cup pistachios, shelled and chopped
- ¼ cup unsweetened coconut flakes

Directions:

1. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Prepare the pomegranate seeds, pistachios and coconut flakes in separate bowls.
3. Fill one large pot with water and place a smaller pot inside. Bring to a boil then reduce to the lowest heat. Ensure no water is able to get into the smaller pot.
4. Break the dark chocolate into pieces and add to the smaller pot. Stir continuously until just melted. Do not overheat as it will cause the chocolate to get lumpy.
5. Pour the melted chocolate onto the baking sheet. Use a spatula to smooth it into an even layer about ¼ inch thick.
6. Quickly sprinkle the pomegranate seeds evenly over the top, followed by the pistachios, & finally the coconut flakes.
7. Transfer to the fridge or freezer and let chill until firm, about 20-30 minutes.
8. Once it's firm, break or cut into pieces and enjoy!

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