

COVID-19 and the holidays: Five things you can do to physically prepare for the long winter

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The holiday season can be a tricky time to maintain physical health, and with COVID-19 keeping many people indoors and isolated, there are

even more barriers to wellness.

"When we spend more time isolated and indoors, our [physical health](#) can become an afterthought," says Madhan Prabhakaran, M.D., family medicine physician, Mayo Clinic Health System in Fairmont. "We have to stay vigilant not only about COVID-19, but also about maintaining our overall [health](#) and wellness."

Here are five things you can do to prepare your body for a pandemic winter:

1. Get your [flu shot](#).

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and on the verge of another flu season, it's more important than ever to be vaccinated for influenza as soon as possible. The flu is a viral infection that attacks your respiratory system, similar to COVID-19, and it shares similar symptoms with COVID-19. If more people are vaccinated for the flu, fewer people will become sick with the flu and fewer patients will require hospitalization. When there are fewer flu cases, hospital resources are freed up for COVID-19 patients in the event of surges.

2. Keep up with preventive screenings and checkups.

Even if you're feeling healthy, a regular checkup with your provider is a good way to validate your health or identify a problem in its early stages. Early detection of a medical issue is the best way to improve effectiveness of condition treatment and management. In addition, people without underlying health conditions appear to recover faster from, and have lower rates of complications or death from, COVID-19. So staying healthy is important this and every season.

3. Plan an indoor exercise routine.

Regular exercise is good for your body and mind. It decreases your risk for [heart disease](#) and stroke, helps you maintain a healthy weight, improves the quality of your sleep and improves your mood. As we transition to more time indoors, research indoor fitness options, such as apps or videos, that you can do at home. Or dust off unused exercise equipment in your basement. Also, many gyms have reopened, and they can be a good option. Here are steps to protect yourself from COVID-19 if you return to a gym.

4. Warm up to outdoor winter activities.

You may have heard the phrase, "There's no such thing as [bad weather](#), only bad clothing." Winter weather is more enjoyable if you have the proper equipment. This winter may be a perfect opportunity to invest in some new cold-weather gear and try a new winter activity, such as snowshoeing, cross-country skiing or ice fishing. With the proper outdoor clothing, your family can fully embrace the colder temperatures without running back indoors in five minutes. Your family also can try outdoor treasure hunts, hiking, cookouts, camping, photography, painting the snow or other winter activities. Visiting with family and friends outdoors, while still maintaining social distance, can be a safer way to interact with your loved ones.

5. Map out a healthy meal plan.

Meal planning is a great way to prepare for healthy dinners, simplify your shopping trip and save money. This also helps fend off the desire to reach for processed or fast food. Spend an hour listing 10 to 15 healthy dinner options and the necessary ingredients for each. Then incorporate these options into your weekly meal plan. You can always reuse meal plans and grocery lists to cut down on planning time. You may find that a two- or three-week seasonal meal plan provides enough variety for your family. And this type of planning eliminates the daily stress of

what's for dinner and makes the healthy choices easier.

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