

A Happy, Healthy Holiday Part 2: More Holiday Sanity Hints

For families with young children, holiday time can be magical yet stressful. Often families travel great distances to be together and parties tend to run late. Fancy food and fancy dress are common. And winter holidays, well, they occur in the winter, usually during flu season, stomach virus season, and in general multi-illness season. Here are some suggestions about how to keep your kids healthy and happy during this time.

We preface by referring you to suggestions # 1, 2, and 3 of Part 1 of A Happy, Healthy Holiday. HANDWASHING, HANDWASHING, AND HANDWASHING will prevent spread of germs. In addition:

1. Traveling 400 miles away from home to spend the week with close family and/or friends is not the time to solve your child's chronic problems. Let's say you have a child who is a poor sleeper and tries to climb into your bed every night at home and you have chronic fatigue from arguing with her/walking her back to bed. Knowing that even the best of sleepers will often have difficulty with sleeping in a new environment, just take your "bad sleeper" into your bed at bedtime and avoid your usual exhausting home routine of waking up every hour to walk her back into her room. That way everyone gets better sleep. Similarly, if you have a very picky eater, pack up her favorite portable meals and have them available during the fancy dinners. (But when you return home, please refer to our podcast and blog posts on helping your child to establish good sleep habits and on feeding picky eaters.) Good sleep and good nutrition keep children and their parents healthy and happy.
2. Think of giving your children a wholesome, healthy

meal at home before a holiday party which you know will be filled with junk food and food that may seem "foreign" to your children. Hunger fuels tantrums, so eliminate that meltdown source by taking them to the party with full bellies. Also you won't feel guilty letting them have some of the sweets because they already ate a healthy meal.

3. Speaking of sweets, ginger-bread house vomit is DISGUSTING. Dr. Kardos found this out first-hand with one of her children after a holiday party where the hostess served the kids a beautiful (and generous sized) ginger bread house for dessert. While Dr. Kardos was engrossed in conversation with a long lost friend, one of her boys over-ate. Make sure you supervise what your child is eating at parties.
4. If you have a young baby, be careful not to put yourself in a situation where you lose control of your ability to protect the baby from germs. Well-meaning family members love passing infants from person to person, smothering them with kisses along the way. Unfortunately, kisses can spread cold and flu germs, as well as stomach virus germs.
5. On the flip side, there are some family events, such as having your 95-year-old grandfather meet your baby for the first time, that are once in a lifetime. While you should be cautious on behalf of your child, you can balance caution while looking at the whole context of a situation before deciding whether or not to attend a gathering.
6. Once you have children, their needs come before yours. (Of course there is a healthy balance-but that is a talk for another day.) Although you have anticipated a holiday reunion, your child may be too young to remember

it. An ill, overtired child makes everyone miserable. If your child has a cold, is tired, won't use the unfamiliar bathroom, has eaten too many cookies and has a belly ache, and is in general crying, clingy, and miserable, just leave the party. You can console yourself that when your child is older his actions at that gathering may be the stuff of legends, or at least will make for a funny story.

7. For the allergic families- think twice before you drag in a live Christmas tree into your house. The trees are often covered in dust and mud. Washing the tree off with a hose in the driveway will keep the sneezing down to a minimum. Every year Dr. Lai tells families about rinsing off the tree in the driveway. Most parents dismiss the idea as too time consuming. However, she is pleased to report that a family recently told her they did rinse the tree and it did help keep the allergens at bay.

8. No one else baby proofs. Remember this when you are on the road. We worry less in our own homes. But with their medication pills lying on the end tables and their menorah candles within a toddler's reach, other people's homes should make us more cautious. One year at holiday time Dr. Lai's family was in a hotel room and her six year old came running up saying "look what I found"...It was a pill of Viagra.

We wish you all the best this holiday season.

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