



PROTECT YOUR FAMILY

THIS

Holiday Season

Compiled by SafeStart



Happy Holidays

The winter holidays can be a mixture of excitement and dread. Most of us look forward to the days off, visiting family members, traveling, and holiday foods. But the work and effort that's required can sometimes take the joy right out of the festive season. The excitement of the holiday also means that we are more likely to ignore certain warning signs or act unsafely around hazards. After all, how can anything bad happen over the holidays?

We are also often tired, frustrated and rushed because of the extra responsibilities and tasks like last-minute shopping, gift wrapping, decorating the house, preparing spare bedrooms, or going to school plays.

This, added to the usual workload (or extra workload since some workplaces get busier over the holidays), is a recipe for disaster. And it's the reason why every winter, there's a rise in injuries and fatalities caused by decorating, lifting heavy packages and suitcases, cooking, fires, and car crashes.

This guide can help you prepare for the holiday season and make sure that you and your loved ones welcome the New Year safe and healthy (if a little full).

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Decorating

During the last two months of each year, about 200 people a day¹ suffer decoration-related injuries. People are treated in emergency rooms for injuries related to Christmas trees (that's right), holiday lights,² ornaments and other decorations. That's hardly festive!

Fractures, concussions, muscle pulls, and bruises (among others) are the result of falling off furniture, rooftops, porches or down the stairs,³ with the most common being ladder accidents. Here are some tips on how to stay safe when decorating:



- **Always make sure you are stepping on a stable surface.**
- **Don't climb onto furniture. Use a stool or a ladder.**
- **Don't place ladders on slippery surfaces or area rugs.**
- **Clean up the area around the ladder to prevent additional injuries if you do fall off.**
- **It is better to work in pairs. Have someone for backup, especially if you have to decorate very high places.**
- **Don't decorate while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.**
- **If you're rushing or getting frustrated with the decorations, you're more likely to get hurt. Consider your state of mind and ask for help if the job feels a little overwhelming.**

¹<http://health.usnews.com/health-news/health-wellness/articles/2015/12/03/dont-fall-for-christmas-lights-illuminating-safety-in-holiday-decorating>

²<http://www.nsc.org/act/events/Pages/12-Days-of-Safety.aspx>

³<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5348a1.htm>





Electric Shocks

Thousands of people are treated each holiday season after sustaining an electric shock.⁴ These incidents are mostly caused by carelessness and misuse of (sometimes old and faulty) decorations. They can be the cause of cardiac arrests and tissue and nerve damage among other serious injuries.

Prevent electrical shocks and electrical fires by following these tips:



- **Use lights with a UL safety certification.**
- **Consider using LED holiday lights as they use less power and create less heat.**
- **Inspect the lights to ensure they are not frayed or torn. Just because your lights have served you for years, doesn't mean they don't need a thorough once-over. Complacency and electricity are not a good mix.**
- **Never use electric lights on a metallic tree.**
- **Don't overload sockets.**
- **Unplug decorations for the night and when you are away from home. Leaving them on is a dangerous habit. Alternatively, consider plugging them into timers.**
- **Follow the proper use and care of your decorations.**
- **Never touch any electric wirings when you are wet.**

⁴<http://www.henderson-law.com/blog/2016/december/most-common-holiday-injuries-accidents/>

Fires

Christmas trees and decorations account for almost 2,000 fires each year.⁵ There are also thousands of candle-related fires during the holidays, with most candle fires occurring on Christmas and New Year's Day.

The winter season also sees a rise in heating



fires, cooking fires and electrical fires, so follow these rules:

- **Keep your candles in a sturdy candle holder to prevent them from being knocked over.**
- **Make sure the flame is fully extinguished when you leave the room.**
- **Never put real candles on your Christmas tree—this trend is making a comeback and although it might seem quaint, it's a dangerous fire hazard.**
- **Keep real trees watered to avoid drying out—brown, dead needles are much more flammable.**
- **Don't try to dispose of your tree by putting it in the fireplace.**
- **Don't place your tree close to a heat source.**
- **Only use heaters that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory and are in safe, working condition.**
- **Never leave your cooking equipment unattended.**
- **Don't put wrapping paper in the fireplace.**
- **If you're using a turkey fryer, put it on flat ground and away from anything combustible. And make sure your turkey is completely thawed before attempting to deep fry it.**
- **You should always have a fire extinguisher on-hand in the event a small fire breaks out.**
- **Don't be complacent around fire. Even a small flame can spread in seconds.**



⁵https://earthsciences.typepad.com/files/holiday_decorating_safety.pdf

Car Crashes

Car crashes are one of the most common causes of injuries and fatalities during the holiday season. From Thanksgiving until the beginning of January, more people travel each day, increasing the number of drivers on the road. But they are also stressed, rushed, frustrated, tired and sometimes impaired, so paying extra attention to other drivers is a must during this time.

Poor weather conditions can also be a factor and, in the event of severe weather conditions, you should stay indoors. Do not drive unless it is completely necessary, but if you simply must drive, remember these guidelines:



- **If possible, don't travel alone.**
- **When bad weather is expected, ensure that you have a full tank and that your car is in good working order.**
- **Keep your cellphone with you (fully charged), but do NOT use it while driving.**
- **Turn on the car radio to a local station to check for weather updates/road conditions.**
- **Make sure every person in the car has a seat belt on.**
- **DO NOT drink and drive. Agree on a designated driver, or call a taxi or a drive-your-car-home service (if available in your area). And don't let your friends and family drive if they've been drinking.**
- **Let someone know when you leave and keep them updated of your whereabouts and location when you can.**

Car Crashes

- **Adjust your speed to the weather conditions and keep a safe distance from the cars ahead.**
- **Avoid using cruise control on roads that are—or you suspect might be—slippery.**
- **Watch out for distracted drivers and pedestrians—the holidays can affect a person’s state of mind.**
- **Keep a ‘survival kit’ in your trunk. It should include gloves, booster cables, windshield wiper fluid, a small shovel, a snow brush, a flashlight, reflectors, a safety vest, candles (in a can), matches, a whistle, a blanket, warm clothes, and non-perishable foods. Make a habit of taking water with you every trip since you shouldn’t leave it in your car.**
- **Shopping center parking lots are much busier during the holiday season, so don’t rush and keep your eyes and mind on task. Especially when backing out of parking spaces.**
- **Always have a first aid kit in the car.**
- **Driving long distances with small children can be draining. So consider your state of mind as it can affect your driving. Rushing, fatigue or getting frustrated can get you killed.**
- **If you’re traveling from a warm area to somewhere snowy, keep in mind that you may not be used to driving in those conditions. Use additional caution and make sure your vehicle is equipped to handle the different weather conditions.**



Back Injuries

Tens of thousands of people are treated each year for injuries related to carrying luggage.⁶ What's more, extended periods of being immobile while traveling by car or plane can also cause or exacerbate back pain or injury. And rushing around and the frustration of the holiday season are hardly helping people remember to use proper lifting techniques, stretch, or take their time when shoveling.



- **Try to pack lightly, only taking things that are necessary.**
- **Choose luggage with wheels and handles.**
- **If you need to lift something (even if it's not heavy), bend your knees, hold it close to your body and lift it with your leg muscles, not the waist.**
- **Make sure to balance the weight of a backpack on your shoulders—ensure both straps are padded.**
- **If you're carrying something and it gets too heavy, take a break—there's no reward for pushing through.**
- **Remember to consider your state of mind. If you're rushing, remember that it's better to make a few more trips than hurt your back.**
- **If something is too heavy, consider doing a team lift, asking for help, or getting a lifting device.**
- **When shoveling, push when possible, throw snow forward, and pace yourself.**
- **Remember to use proper lifting techniques and ask for help when setting up the Christmas tree, or getting your artificial tree or decorations out of storage.**



⁶<http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/topic.cfm?topic=A00367>



Opening Presents

Opening presents is an exciting event. Emotions run high, people don't pay attention to what they're doing, and sometimes the packaging is frustratingly hard to deal with. There is even a term for high levels of anger and frustration caused by the inability to open tricky packaging: wrap rage.

Unfortunately, that frustration can easily lead to injuries, which is the last thing you need over the holidays. To avoid being one of the thousands of people visiting the emergency room because of packaging-related injuries,⁷ remember:



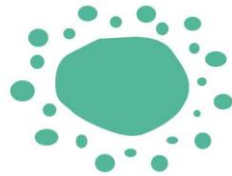
- **Do NOT use your teeth to open tricky packaging.**
- **Use an appropriate tool for the job. When something sharp is necessary, don't grab the first pointed or bladed thing you can find.**
- **When using scissors or knives, keep them away from pets and children and do not leave them on the ground. They could easily get lost among the wrapping paper and packaging.**
- **Try to catch yourself if you're frustrated or rushing. Taking a little longer to open the gift will not ruin the day. Stay calm and just enjoy the moment.**

⁷<https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2017/03/04/clamshell-packaging-is-an-often-dangerous-lesson-in-bad-design.html>

Food Poisoning

The holiday season brings with it the joys and pitfalls of overeating and indulging in seasonal foods and drinks. As enjoyable as they are, they don't come risk-free. Meat alone is responsible for over a million⁸ cases of food poisoning a year. And how about eggnog and different kinds of cheese?

To make sure that everyone enjoys their food without ending up in the hospital or spending their holidays in the bathroom, follow the tips below. If you want to learn more, additional holiday food safety rules can be easily found online.^{9 10}



- **Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly when handling food.**
- **Thaw your turkey safely (in the refrigerator or in a sink of cold water, but not on the counter).**
- **Prepare dishes that don't require cooking before handling raw meat to reduce cross-contamination.**
- **Do not rinse raw meat and poultry before cooking.**
- **Keep meat, poultry, seafood, and egg foods separated from other foods in the fridge.**
- **Use separate cutting boards for raw meat and cooked or ready-to-eat items.**
- **Use a food thermometer to ensure that the meat is fully cooked.**
- **Bring sauces, soups and gravies to a rolling boil when reheating.**
- **Refrigerate food within two hours of cooking.**
- **Remember that Thanksgiving and Christmas leftovers are safe for four days in the refrigerator.**
- **Do not store cleaning products or chemicals near food. This might be obvious, but every year someone puts Pine Sol® instead of cooking oil in their food.**

⁸<https://www.livestrong.com/article/121114-signs-symptoms-poisoning-bad/>

⁹<https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/events/Winter%20Holidays/index.html>

¹⁰<https://www.cdc.gov/features/holidayfoodsafety/index.html>



Additional Cooking Hazards

There are numerous ways to get hurt over the holidays and cooking-related injuries are common. So keep in mind that preparing large meals in a busy household, with multiple things going on at the same time, can cause people to rush, get frustrated, miss something vital or simply not pay attention to what they're doing. Keep in mind these most common cooking injuries:



- **Cuts or lacerations while preparing a meal or carving a turkey.**
- **Burns—for example, people sometimes forget a pan is hot or get splashed with hot oil.**
- **Slips and falls—dropped objects and pieces of food or splashes of grease or water mixed with crowded kitchens and a larger than usual number of objects cluttering the area are a perfect mix for a slip and fall.**

So remember to think about your state of mind regularly and slow down or calm down before handling sharp or hot objects. The holiday meal won't be ruined just because you took a few extra seconds to be safe.

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Pet Safety

Every holiday season, calls to Pet Poison Helpline increase substantially. Certain holiday items (like tinsel) can cause internal injuries and some foods can be poisonous or make pets very sick. For example, chocolate, candy, and some fruit (such as grapes, raisins and currants) are toxic to dogs while lilies are poisonous to cats.

So keep your family pets safe:



- **Keep Christmas cacti, poinsettias, lilies, holly or mistletoe away from pets.**
- **In general, prevent your pets from eating:**
 - **chocolate or cocoa**
 - **candy and other products with xylitol (including some types of peanut butter)**
 - **macadamia nuts**
 - **yeast bread dough**
 - **grapes**
 - **onions**
 - **garlic**
 - **leftover fatty meat scraps**
 - **alcohol**
 - **fruit cakes soaked in rum or containing raisins and currants**
- **Keep tinsel (and ribbon, yarn and thread) away from pets.**
- **Potpourri and essential oils are dangerous, so keep them out of pets' reach.**
- **Keep snow globes out of reach (some imported ones may contain antifreeze).**
- **Put handbags out of reach as they can contain substances poisonous to pets.**



Guest Safety

Visiting family members and friends might not be very familiar with your house and your habits, so make sure you warn them about anything they might not expect. For example, let them know about that one exposed nail or loose piece of carpeting that you've learned to avoid. Tell them if you keep dangerous medication in Aspirin bottles, if non-food products that can be mistaken for food are stored in food containers, or if you're in the habit of leaving the coffee-maker cleaner in the machine overnight.

Additionally, curious children may go through people's personal belongings or your bathroom and kitchen cabinets, often finding medicines and other substances that can be lethal if ingested. So remember:



- **Warn your guests of any potential hazards in your home.**
- **Ensure that guests have night lights or easy-to-reach lamps.**
- **Check your carbon monoxide and smoke alarms and ensure they are functioning properly.**
- **Take out anything that's not safe to eat out of your refrigerator. You know what you have in some unmarked containers. Your guests don't.**
- **If your guests have small children, invest in some child-proof cupboard locks, provide visitors with a safe place to put their medicines and ensure that your own are not easily accessible.**
- **Keep chemicals, cleaners and other products in their original containers. Accidental use happens more often than you think.**
- **Shovel and salt/sand icy walkways.**

One last thing



Have a warm, loving and restful holiday. But, may it also be safe for you and your loved ones.