

WESTMORELAND COUNTY

AREA AGENCY ON AGING

INSIDE LINE

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HOLIDAY SHOPPING SURVIVAL TIPS

Holiday shopping can be a stressful chore that many people dread. Whether you shop gradually before the holidays or wait until the last minute, here are a few tips to help you survive and thrive when shopping during the holiday season:

- Plan ahead. To get what you want, make sure you know when the sales begin and when they end. Some sales may only last a few days or even a few hours, so plan accordingly.
- Read product reviews before making decisions on large-ticket items. Check websites such as Amazon.com, About.com, or ConsumerReports.org.
- Map out a shopping route, and create a list of items you're looking for so you feel more prepared and focused. Shopping can feel very overwhelming if you're wandering aimlessly.
- Get to know store policies, such as restocking fees, requirements regarding receipts for returns and exchanges, and short return deadlines.
- Bring your ad (or smartphone/tablet). Not only can a photo help you find what you're looking for faster, but it can help you avoid any price disputes. Many stores will ad-match and save you the hassle of running to multiple locations.
- Beware: Black Friday "deals" may not be as great as they appear. For example, some clothes, toys, electronics, and appliances will cost more on Black Friday than they did earlier in the year. Do your research in advance, and familiarize yourself with item pricing before assuming everything is a bargain.

- Consider subscribing to email alerts and following the Facebook and Twitter feeds of your favorite brands and stores, so you're alerted to any sales updates and flash sales.
- Always ask for gift receipts as a way to make exchanges or returns easier for the recipient without disclosing the price paid.
- There may be a coupon for that! Check out www.retailmenot.com to score the savings you want.

SUPPORT SOMEONE WITH DEPRESSION

Depression is an isolating disorder which often sabotages relationships with friends and family. If you know someone struggling with depression, here are a few tips to offer your support and strengthen your relationship:

- Just be there. Reassure them with kind words such as, "I'm here for you."
- Help them minimize clutter. A stack of dirty dishes or piles of laundry can be very overwhelming to someone suffering from depression.
- Little things make a big difference. Send a text, a card, or leave a reassuring voice mail.
- Cook a healthy meal. Many people suffering from depression will either eat very little or overeat unhealthy choices.
- Educate yourself about depression so you can better understand the symptoms and learn how to better offer support.
- Plan a picnic or take them for a walk. Not only is fresh air refreshing, but sunshine increases vitamin D

production, which can alleviate depression.

- With patience comes hope. Let your loved one know that it doesn't matter how long it takes for them to feel better.

WINTER EYE CARE

As the weather changes during cooler winter months and the air becomes dry and crisp, you may notice eye discomfort during the changing seasons. Here are a few tips to help protect your eyes:

- Wear protective sunglasses year-round, not just in summer months. Ultraviolet rays can be even more detrimental if you happen to live in an area with snow, since ultraviolet rays are easily reflected off the light surface area.
- If you wear glasses, consider purchasing prescription sunglasses as well.
- Wear polarized lenses or goggles when skiing to protect against glare, cold and wind.
- A humidifier can prevent dry eyes when your heating system is running.
- Drink plenty of water in order to keep your body hydrated. Even mild dehydration can negatively affect the watery component of the eye.
- Avoid blasting heat toward your face when sitting in your vehicle, as doing so can cause your eyes to dry quickly and feel scratchy and uncomfortable.
- Increase your consumption of omega-3 fatty acids or take a fish oil supplement to ease tear gland inflammation caused by dry air.

BREAKING BAD HABITS

by the National Institutes of Health

If you know something is bad for you, why can't you just stop? About 70% of smokers say they would like to quit. Drug and alcohol abusers struggle to give up addictions that hurt their bodies and tear apart families and friendships. Any many of us have unhealthy excess weight that we could lose if only we would eat right and exercise more. So why don't we do it?

Scientists have studied what happens in our brains as habits form. They've found clues to why bad habits, once established, are so difficult to kick. And they're developing strategies to help us make the changes we'd like to make.

Habits can arise through repetition. They are a normal part of life, and are often helpful. We can drive along familiar routes on mental autopilot without really thinking about the directions. This frees up our brains to focus on different things.

Habits can also develop when good or enjoyable events trigger the brain's "reward" centers. This can set up potentially harmful routines, such as overeating, smoking, drug or alcohol abuse, gambling and even compulsive use of computers and social media. Both types of habits are based on the same types of brain mechanisms. But there is a difference, and this difference makes the pleasure-based habits so much harder to break.

Enjoyable behaviors can prompt your brain to release a chemical called dopamine. If you do something over and over, and dopamine is present when you're doing it that strengthens the habit even more. When you're not doing those things, dopamine creates the craving to do it again.

In a sense, then, parts of our brains are working against us when we try to overcome bad habits. And the brain's reward centers keep us craving the things we're trying so hard to resist. The good news is, humans are not simply creatures of habit. We have many more brain regions to help us do what's best for our health. Regularly practicing different types of self-control, such as sitting up straight or keeping a food diary, can strengthen your resolve.

One approach is to focus on becoming more aware of your unhealthy habits then develop strategies to counteract them. For

example, habits can be linked in our minds to certain places and activities. You could develop a plan, say, to avoid walking down the hall where there's a candy machine. Resolve to avoid going places where you've usually smoked. Stay away from friends and situations linked to problem drinking or drug use.

Another helpful technique is to visualize yourself in a tempting situation and mentally practice the good behavior over the bad. If you'll be at a party and want to eat vegetables instead of fattening foods, then mentally visualize yourself doing that.

One way to kick bad habits is to actively replace unhealthy routines with new, healthy ones. Some people find they can replace a bad habit, even drug addiction, with another behavior, like exercising.

Another thing that makes habits especially hard to break is that replacing a first-learned habit with a new one doesn't erase the original behavior. Rather, both remain in your brain. But you can take steps to strengthen the new one and suppress the original one. Research is exploring whether certain medications can help to disrupt hard-wired automatic behaviors in the brain and make it easier to form new memories and behaviors. Other scientific teams are searching for genes that might allow some people to easily form and others to readily suppress habits.

Bad habits may be hard to change, but it can be done. Enlist the help of friends, co-workers and family for some extra support.

THE STING OF SHINGLES

by The National Institutes of Health

If you've ever had chickenpox, you may be at risk for a painful disease called shingles as you grow older. Shingles is a sometimes-agonizing skin rash and nerve disease that's caused by a virus. Fortunately, you can take steps to prevent shingles or ease its serious effects.

Shingles usually affects adults after age 50, although it can strike at any age. "In the U.S., the incidence of shingles is actually increasing," says Dr. Jeffrey Cohen, an infectious disease researcher at NIH. "If you live to be 85 years old, you have a 50% chance of getting shingles."

Shingles is caused by the varicella-zoster virus, the same virus that causes

chickenpox. Once you've had chickenpox, the virus stays with you for life, hidden and inactive in your nerve cells. Your immune system helps keep chickenpox from returning. But later in life, the virus can re-emerge and cause shingles (also known as herpes zoster).

You can't "catch" shingles from someone else. But it is possible for a person with a blistering shingles rash to pass on the varicella-zoster virus to someone who's never had chickenpox or a chickenpox vaccine. If that happens, the other person would get chickenpox, not shingles.

Shingles can lead to some serious problems. If it appears on your face, it can affect your hearing and vision. It may cause lasting eye damage or blindness. After the rash fades, the pain may linger for months or years, especially in older people. This lasting pain, called post-herpetic neuralgia, affects nearly 1 out of every 3 older people with shingles. The pain can be so severe that even the gentlest touch or breeze can feel excruciating.

To help prevent these problems, see your doctor at the first sign of shingles. Early treatment can shorten the length of infection and reduce the risk of serious complications.

To treat shingles, your doctor may prescribe antiviral drugs to help fight the varicella-zoster virus. Steroids can lessen pain and shorten the time you're sick. Other types of medicines can also relieve pain.

Fortunately, a vaccine called Zostavax can help prevent shingles or decrease its severity. It's been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for people ages 50 and older. "The vaccine can prevent shingles and reduce the risk of post-herpetic neuralgia, which can be very debilitating," Cohen says.

The shingles vaccine is available by prescription. Unfortunately, the vaccine is expensive, and the costs aren't always covered by health insurance. If you're considering the shingles vaccine, be sure to discuss the pros and cons of the vaccine with your doctor, and check with your insurance provider about coverage.

Now that people have been receiving the shingles vaccine for several years, researchers are evaluating whether booster shots might be appropriate. Scientists are also studying post-herpetic neuralgia to find better ways to treat this complication from shingles.

BEHOLD THE AGELESS FRUITCAKE

The Tonight Show host Johnny Carson used to joke that there really is “only one fruitcake in the world...it’s passed from family to family.” Although often the object of humor, the persistent fruitcake emerges each year as a viable holiday gift option. And why not?

They’re sweet, nutritious and they last a long time. If a fruitcake contains alcohol, it can remain edible for decades. During a 2003 telecast of *The Tonight Show*, host Jay Leno sampled a then 125 year old fruit cake. Baked in 1878, the cake is still being kept as an heirloom by a family in Tecumseh, Michigan. That’s one cake that was never passed to another family. Here’s a little history:

- Fruitcake history goes back to ancient Rome where early recipes list pomegranate seeds, pine nuts, and raisins mixed into barley mash.
- During the Middle Ages, honey, spices and preserved fruits were added. However, in some instances church regulations forbade the use of butter. In a written permission known as the ‘Butter Brief,’ Pope Innocent VIII gave permission in 1490, to Saxony to use milk and butter in the North German Stollen fruitcakes.
- Starting in the 16th century, sugar from the American Colonies and the discovery that high concentrations of sugar could preserve fruits created an excess of candied fruit, thus making fruitcakes more affordable and popular.
- Mail-order fruitcakes began in America in 1913.
- In 1935 the expression “nutty as a fruitcake” was derived because some well-known commercial bakers were Southern companies with access to cheap nuts.
- Since 1995, Manitou Springs, Colorado, has hosted the Great Fruitcake Toss on the first Saturday of every January. “We encourage the use of recycled fruitcakes,” says Leslie Lewis of the Manitou Springs Chamber of Commerce. In 2007 a group of eight Boeing engineers set the all-time Great Fruitcake Toss record at 1,420 feet. The engineers concocted a mock artillery piece fueled by compressed air pumped by an exercise bike.

PROTECT YOUR TENDONS

by the National Institutes of Health

You’ve probably heard of such sports injuries as tennis elbow or jumper’s knee. These are just 2 examples of tendinitis, a painful condition caused by overusing and straining the joints in your body.

Tendons are the tough but flexible bands of tissue that connect muscle to bones. You have about 4,000 tendons throughout your body. Tendons make it possible for you to bend your knee, rotate your shoulder, and grasp with your hand.

Tendinitis is inflammation of a tendon. (When you see “itis” at the end of a medical word, it means inflammation.) In tendinitis, the tendon gets inflamed and can rub against bone, making movement painful.

Tendinitis is usually caused by repeated motion, stress, or injury to certain muscles or joints. A sports or job-related injury is a common way to get tendinitis, but the condition can happen to anyone. Your risk for tendinitis also increases with age. “Tendons lose health as we get older and become less able to handle the load,” says Dr. Evan Flatow, an orthopedist at Mount Sinai Roosevelt Hospital in New York.

Any activity that requires repetitive wrist turning or hand gripping, jumping or bending, pulling, pushing, or lifting can irritate the tendons. Some of the most common places to get the condition are in the shoulders, elbows, hands, wrists, knees, and ankles. Gardeners, carpenters, musicians, and other people whose work regularly places stress around the same tendons are at increased risk for developing tendinitis.

If treated early, tendinitis is usually a short-term condition. But it can come back if the tendon is aggravated over and over again. If tendinitis keeps affecting the same area over time, the tendon can weaken and tear or break.

If you have pain or swelling and especially if you can’t move a joint at all, contact a primary care doctor or an orthopedist. They can perform tests to pinpoint the exact areas of inflammation. You may also get an MRI scan or X-ray to check for a tear in the tendon or rule out other conditions, such as arthritis.

The first step in treating tendinitis is to reduce pain and swelling. Be sure to rest the swollen tendon so it can heal. “We have to break the cycle of

inflammation to allow therapy to work,” Flatow says. A doctor may prescribe medicines that relieve inflammation (such as aspirin or ibuprofen), give steroid injections, or give you a splint or brace. Then gentle exercises can help strengthen the tendon.

If a tendon becomes torn, surgery might be needed to repair the damage. NIH-funded researchers such as Flatow are working to develop new ways to repair and regenerate tendons without surgery.

Regular physical activity helps keep muscles, bones, and tendons strong, and can lower your risk of injury and tendinitis. But be careful not to overdo it so you don’t injure yourself.

“Keep joints limber,” Flatow advises. “Warm up and stretch before physical activity to prevent sudden injury”. Take care of your tendons so they can keep you painlessly bending and flexing your muscles long into old age.

YEARS OF AVIATION

Wilbur and Orville Wright took to the air for the first time on December 17, 1903, near Kitty Hawk Bay on the Outer Banks of North Carolina. They made two flights each from level ground into a freezing headwind gusting to 27 miles per hour. The first flight, by Orville at 10:35 am, of 120 feet in 12 seconds, at a speed of only 6.8 miles per hour over the ground, was recorded in a famous photograph. The next two flights covered approximately 175 feet and 200 feet, by Wilbur and Orville respectively. Their altitude was about 10 feet above the ground.

Five people witnessed the flights: Adam Etheridge, John T. Daniels (who snapped the famous “first flight” photo), Will Dough, W.C. Brinkley; and Johnny Moore, a teenaged boy who lived in the area.

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LIP HEALTH

Unlike the skin on the rest of our bodies, our lips lack natural oils that help retain moisture. Lips are also exposed to many irritants, including the tip of the tongue, food, drinks, cold weather, and more. Here are a few tips to improve your lip health:

- Get hydrated. Water is very important to your overall skin health, especially your lips.
- Don't lick your lips. Saliva evaporates quickly, leaving your lips even dryer.
- Breathe through your nose instead of your mouth to prevent constant moisture-sapping airflow over your lips.
- If you smoke, stop. Cigarettes and

chewing tobacco can stain the skin around your lips and cause oral cancer.

- Choose lip balm products with beeswax, petroleum jelly, or paraffin, which seal in moisture and won't evaporate as quickly as thinner balms.
- Exfoliate your lips once a week by rubbing gently with a wet washcloth or soft-bristled toothbrush.
- If you wear lipstick, choose one that contains natural moisturizing ingredients and vitamins, such as lanolin or vitamin E.

INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE

The Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) program offers free tax help for lower income, elderly and persons with

disabilities. Taxpayers are reminded to maintain accurate records, bring this year's tax package, income, interest and dividend statements, and copies of last year's federal and state tax returns when they seek tax help. The tax locations were unavailable at the time of this publication. For more information call RSVP at 1-800-262-2103 ext. 4213.

**The Staff at the
Westmoreland County
Area Agency on Aging is
wishing you a Happy and
Healthy Holiday Season!**

Westmoreland County Area Agency on Aging

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JUST CHEW IT

Chewing sugar-free gum after eating or drinking has many benefits:

- Chewing gum stimulates saliva, which helps clean the mouth of food debris, neutralize plaque acids that form in the mouth after eating, and remineralize enamel to strengthen teeth.
- Chewing gum can help promote weight loss and weight management by helping control cravings, manage hunger, and reduce the temptation to eat.
- The increased flow of saliva when chewing gum maintains acid levels

in the stomach, resulting in better digestion. It also reduces acid levels in the esophagus and may aid in preventing gastroesophageal reflux disease.

- Not only does gum freshen breath, but it also relieves dry mouth discomfort and strengthens the jaws.
- Chewing gum can help whiten teeth by reducing and preventing stains.
- Because chewing gum increases blood flow to the brain and helps your body produce more oxygen, it can help improve memory, enhance cognitive abilities, and increase alertness and concentration.

LEFTOVER SAFE STORAGE

Be sure to never wrap warm meat or poultry in aluminum foil and place it in the refrigerator. Foil is an excellent insulator and the meat will remain warm, for too long a period allowing bacteria to thrive. Wrap the food in plastic wrap or place in a well-sealed plastic container. Meat, poultry and stuffing should last 3-4 days if stored separately.