Healthy holidays for the entire family.

The holiday season is a time of laughter, joy, cheers, traditions, songs, gifts, food, and most important a time to spend all of this with family and friends. Remember the reason for the season and take some time to de-stress and enjoy the excitement of it all.

As the holiday season is in full swing, the pace of the day and night can be really hectic. Take a deep breath and make a plan.

I am a list maker, so I think of shopping errands I can trip-chain or do at the same time. For example, get gas on the way to the grocery store or while I’m out delivering presents. Make a list of individuals and gifts before you go shopping to avoid impulse buying.

Looking for some inexpensive fun family diversion? Bundle up in warm clothes, fix some hot chocolate and walk the local neighborhood singing holiday songs. You can meet other neighbors and gathers some friends to join you along the route. Enjoy the sights and sounds and the holiday lights. Children will enjoy the chance to be outside.

Plan for meals and snacks that take little preparation during this busy time. Crock pot meals and hearty soups and warm bread are good choices.

Grisel Negron, Multi-County UF/IFAS Extension faculty member working with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program, has some healthy holiday hints for you.

Holiday cooking can be exciting as well as challenging during this time. Cooking food that everyone likes, that is tasty as well as healthy can both nurture our body as well as our soul.

We can be traditional and follow family recipes with a few changes. For instance, you can trade the traditional ham, lamb or pork for a savory baked turkey which is a white meat that contains less fat. Season the turkey the night before with a mix of dried oregano, parsley, garlic powder and bitter orange.

Add a vegetable stuffing inside the turkey as it is cooking to make it a bit different. Use your favorite vegetables for the stuffing or have the family try new ones on the side.

Holiday celebrations are the time to bring the magic and bright colors of the holiday season to the family table. Surprise them with new food items like vegetables and fruits.

Remember, the more vegetables and fruits you eat, the better.

Go light with your desserts and dressings for your salads and offer low calorie beverages. Set your meal in bright colorful serving plates on a nicely decorated table. Tell your family and friends that because you care about them, you prepared a healthy and
delicious meal for them to enjoy. All of this will get little ones as well as adults excited and ready to eat your food.

The following is a healthy recipe for an appetizer – *Veggie Christmas Tree*

1 (8 ounce) bottle fat free ranch salad dressing  
4 cups of broccoli florets, cut into bite size pieces  
1 broccoli stem  
3-4 cups cauliflower florets cut into bite size pieces  
4 or 5 cherry tomatoes, quartered  
1 carrot sliced  

Cover the bottom of a 9x13 inch dish with the salad dressing. Arrange the broccoli florets in the shape of a tree in the prepared dish, using the broccoli stem as the tree trunk. Place the cauliflower florets around the tree. Decorate the tree with the tomatoes and carrots slices. Yield: 20 servings.

This recipe can be found in *Simply Florida, A taste of flavors from the Sunshine State* cookbook available through local UF/IFAS Cooperative Extension offices. Call 321-697-3000 to find an office near you or go to the local offices link at [www.solutionsforyourlife.com](http://www.solutionsforyourlife.com).

Books are on sale for $25 including shipping and handling and a gift card when ordered by December 31, 2007. Shop online at [http://www.simplyflorida.org/](http://www.simplyflorida.org/) There is a discount for quantity orders so retailers may be interested in buying in bulk.

The recipes which feature Florida grown products have been contributed by University of Florida faculty from around the state. Proceeds from the sales support a professional development scholarship for faculty members in Family and Consumer Science.

The photography is beautiful and you will love the recipes. I have found the cookbook makes a great gift, but I suggest you get a few extra because your family and guests will want your copy to take home.

Have a joyous and healthy holiday season!

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