Holiday or Party Buffets

A popular way to celebrate holidays or any party occasion is to invite friends and family to a buffet. However, this type of food service where foods are left out for long periods leaves the door open for uninvited guests – bacteria that cause food-borne illness. Festive times for giving and sharing should not include sharing food-borne illness. Here are some tips from the USDA’s Meat and Poultry Hotline to help you have a SAFE holiday party.

1. **Keep it Clean!** Always wash your hands before and after handling food. Keep your kitchen dishes and utensils clean also. Always serve food on clean plates – not those previously holding raw meat and poultry. Otherwise, the bacteria may have been present in raw meat juices can cross contaminate the food to be served.

2. **Cook thoroughly!** If you are cooking foods ahead of time for your party, be sure to cook thoroughly to safe minimum internal temperatures.
   - Beef, veal and lamb steaks, roasts and chops may be cooked to 145°F.
   - All cuts of pork to 160°F.
   - Ground beef, veal and lamb to 160°F.
   - All poultry should reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F.

3. **Use Shallow Containers.** Divide cooked foods into the shallow containers to store in the refrigerator or freezer until serving. This encourages rapid, even cooling. Reheat hot foods to 165°F. Arrange and serve food on several small platters rather than on one large platter. Keep the rest of the food hot in the oven (set at 200-250°F) or cold in the refrigerator until serving time. This way the food will be held at a safe temperature for a longer period of time. REPLACE empty platters rather than adding fresh food to a dish that already had food in it. Many people’s hands may have been taking food from the dish, which has also been sitting out a room temperature.
4. **Follow the Two-Hour Rule** 
   **Foods.** Food should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours. Keep track of how long foods have been sitting on the buffet table and discard anything there two hour or more.

5. **Keep Hot Foods HOT and Cold Foods COLD.** Hot foods should be held at 140°F or warmer. On the buffet table you can keep hot foods hot with chafing dishes, slow cookers and warming trays. Cold foods should be held at 140°F or cooler. Keep foods cold by nesting dishes in bowls of ice. Otherwise, small serving trays and replace them.

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### GREEN LIVING
**Greening Your Gift Wraps & Holiday Parties**

Traditional wrapping paper produces a lot of waste and has usually been chemically bleached and colored. Here are some interesting and creative alternatives, many from the Partners for Environmental Progress and The ULS Report.

**Greening Your Gift Wraps**

- Get creative with gift-wrapping by wrapping presents in other presents. For example, wrap a new kitchen tool in a dishtowel or a cloth shopping bag.
- Wrap small gifts or gift certificates in a scarf, handkerchief or cloth napkins.
- This may encourage the use of cloth handkerchief and napkins instead of paper ones and will have the added advantage of working to save our old growth forests as well.
- Kids can have fun wrapping presents in he comics’ pages from the Sunday newspaper.
- Instead of wrapping gifts for the kids, hide the presents, plant clues to where they’re hidden and turn the search into a treasure hunt.
- Try buying or making fabric gift bags. They can be made in all different sizes and make wrapping a breeze, simply bag and tie. The recipients can reuse the bag to wrap their own gifts! Or just wrap gifts in scraps of cloth leftover from sewing projects.
- Cloth grocery and carrying bags make excellent wrap, with a practical purpose for long after the holidays have ended. Add a colorful bows and voila!
- Wrap presents in reusable containers such as tins, gift bags, etc. Be sure to reuse boxes, bags and bows for future gifts.
- Kids’ artwork is a perfect wrapping for presents to proud grandparents.
- Make the wrap a part of the gift: Put cookies in a flower-pot or hide jewelry in a new pair of gloves.
- If you don’t want to give up traditional paper and cards, at
least look for products made from recycled paper, with soy inks. Paper bags made from unbleached, recycled paper are sturdy enough to be reused.

- Remember some gifts don’t need wrapping, such as tickets to concerts, museums or sporting events, gift certificates, house plants and garden plants and gifts of your own time. Put just a bow on oversized gifts like a bike or stereo . . .

Did you know . . . if every family reused just two feet of holiday ribbon, the 38,000 miles of ribbon saved could tie a bow around the entire plant?

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For formal affairs, consider renting seldom worn party clothes or buying them from consignment shops.

Make your parties more elegant. Did you know that you can find great deals on plates, cups, and flatware at many local thrift stores, flea markets and garage sales? Instead of using disposables, why not pick up extra dishes and flatware that you can use for parties and picnics? You can have fun with pretty plates that are all different but the same color scheme or buy interesting sets that work together.

You can also rent dishes and glassware, making your party more elegant and eliminating the need to buy special holiday china.

Walk to neighborhood parties or carpool (with a designated driver!) with friends if it’s too far to walk.

After the party, don’t throw away the leftovers! Put them in plastic containers or bags and send them home with guests or donate to food banks.

Plan meals wisely and practice portion control to minimize waste in the first place.

Compost your food waste. Fruits and vegetables and their peels, pits and seeds are all perfect for composting – a great natural fertilizer and soil conditioner.
The multicultural world that our children now experience is truly a testimony to an ideal America was founded upon: freedom. America is still a country full of promise and opportunity for people living in repressed regimes, failed governments or poverty-stricken communities. Time was when many family discussions about culture were about cultures in other nations. Now families can focus on the multicultural dimensions of people from other nations who reside here in our country. Our population in North Carolina alone represents families who migrated from central Mexico or Mexican border towns. The Hmong culture is made up of people from Laos or Cambodia who fought alongside American soldiers in the Vietnam War and resettled here after the war. Many African immigrants are attracted to our traditional black universities around Raleigh and Greensboro. These are only a few examples of the different groups that add to our state’s diversity. All of these new people add rich cultural stories, morés and customs to our life together.

The increase in the number of people from other cultures underscores the importance of a greater awareness of these cultures. Culture comprises behaviors and beliefs that characterize particular social, ethnic or age groups.

For example, families within Hispanic communities are formal when they communicate with others, until they become familiar with members outside of the family. This means that school teachers and administrators often adapt their style of interaction in parent-teacher conferences with Hispanic parents. The Hispanic family is interdependent upon each other for support, for child rearing and for loyalty to the family. If you want to attend family gatherings, you may find resistance initially until the family builds trust and familiarity with you. Asian communities also have opportunities for inclusion at festivals or celebrations. In this group, the needs of the individual are not as much of a concern as the needs of the group or community as a whole. Parenting within the Asian community seeks for the child to place the group’s needs ahead of one’s individual needs.

As North Carolina’s population continues to grow and change, it’s important for families to learn more about their neighbors. Parents can foster a world of learning opportunities if they encourage their children to learn about the culture around them. This often requires us to get outside of our own comfort zones and visit someone else’s home, community, religious house of worship or ethnic neighborhood. You will learn a great deal.
Locate multicultural literary authors in your local library and read some of their novels or autobiographies. Attend festivals and community sporting events with other ethnic groups. Build up your family’s social network to include people of other cultures. Seek out a niche in your community to help and support diverse groups of people. Cultural awareness and inclusion is a process. Building new connections that are bridges into other communities is the work of an open heart without judgment or bias. It contributes to community health. Mark Twain wrote, “I have no color prejudices nor caste prejudices nor creed prejudices. All I care to know is that a man is a human being, and that is enough for me; he can’t be any worse.” Explore your new world full of interesting human beings. *(Source: Successful Family)*

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### Getting Fit as a Family

IT IS NEVER TOO EARLY or late to reach children to make healthy lifestyle choices. With childhood obesity on the rise, it’s more important than ever for parents to make exercise and good nutrition part of everyday family life.

How can you get your little couch potatoes off the sofa and on the road to good health? The baby steps, get the kids involved in the choices, and make healthy eating and movement part of the entire family’s routine:

**“A” is for Activities.** Plan and organize activities that fit your family’s skill and age levels, then make these activities a priority. “Two of the biggest contributors to a sedentary lifestyle are the television and the computer,” says Dr. Gerald Berenson, a cardiologist and researcher at Tulane University Medical Center in New Orleans who helped create The Fitkids System, a behavioral modification program designed to help children lose weight.

Parents should limit the amount of time that children spend plopped in front of a screen. Instead of turning on the TV, take a walk, go on a hike, ride bikes, throw a Frisbee or walk the dog. “All of these are simple, enjoyable activities that help reverse the trend our society faces toward a harmful sedentary lifestyle,” Berenson says.
“B” is for Building. Remind children that they’re building habits for a lifetime – even if they don’t see results right away. Recognize efforts as small as five minutes of jumping jacks. “The beauty of the small changes approach is that you can find ways to be physically active throughout the day,” says Dr. James O. Hill, professor of Pediatrics and medicine at the University of Colorado-Denver and co-founder of the America on the Move Foundation.

Make small changes, such as playing on the playground after school or walking the dog each evening. If your kids love playing ball, encourage them to join organized sports. And don’t underestimate the power of a pickup game to keep children and grown-ups interacting in a healthy manner.

“C” is for Counting. “Children are motivated by incentives and evidence of progress,” Berenson says. “Parents should try helping children make it come by setting individual or family goals and tracking their progress.”

Pedometers record the number of steps you take and provide an easy way to show how every step counts. Get a pedometer for each family member. Compete to see who takes the most steps in the day, or chart your progress on a map of imaginary hiking trips to Disney World, to grandma’s or even across the country.

“D” is for Day trips. Family game nights or movie nights build togetherness, but they also lead to sedentary habits. Make your “together time” healthy for your body as well as your relationship by planning physically active day trips. For instance, visiting a zoo or walking through a historic battlefield allow for both movement and conversation. Volunteering for a community service event, such as a walkathon, beach cleanup or food drive, can help the family feel good body and soul.

“E” is for Eating. Your kids probably won’t automatically choose brown rice over French fries, so you need to encourage them to make healthy choices. “The most powerful way parents can help children make good choices themselves,” Hill says. Cutting the family’s sugar and fat intake is a good start, so forgo sodas and chips and dip, and reach for sliced apples or baby carrots in the evening and make sure your kids see you doing it.

To make healthy eating fun, challenge your kids to “eat a rainbow.” Serve snacks of different colors, such as red peppers, orange carrots, yellow bananas and purple plums, to introduce your children to a variety of delicious, healthful foods.

“F” is for Fun. This may be the most important aspect of all. Make exercise fun by choosing different locations for activities and planning a variety of games and challenges.
If you implement these changes slowly and continue to make healthy choices, your family will reap the benefits of good eating habits, fit bodies and the joy of good health.

If smoke begins wafting from chimneys in cooler parts of the country, homeowners are starting the first fires of the home-heating season. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) wants homeowners to learn before they burn this winter. Wood smoke is made up of a mixture of gases and fine particle pollution that isn’t healthy to breathe indoors or out especially for children, older adults and those with heart disease, asthma or other lung diseases.

EPA has established the Burn Wise campaign to reduce wood smoke pollution, helping to protect your home, health and the air we breathe, while keeping those who use wood for that warm throughout the winter.

Burn only dry, seasoned wood. It’s better for the air and your wallet. Look for wood that is darker, has cracks in the end grain, and sounds hollow when hit against another piece of wood. Dry seasoned wood is more efficient at heating your home and can add up to significant savings over the winter. Never burn painted or treated wood or trash.

Maintain your wood stove or fireplace and have a certified technician inspect it yearly. A certified technician can clean dangerous soot from your chimney and keep your wood stove or fireplace working properly, which reduces your risk of a home fire.

Change to an ERA-certified wood stove or fireplace insert. These models are more efficient than older models, keeping your air cleaner, your home safer and your fuel bill lower, while keeping you warm in the winter. An estimated 12 million Americans heat their homes with wood stoves each winter, and nearly three-quarters of these stoves are not EPA certified. An EPA-certified wood stove can emit nearly 70 percent less smoke than older uncertified models.

More information on Burn Wise: [http://www.epa.gov/burnwise](http://www.epa.gov/burnwise)
Spotlight for December
Holiday Safety Tips

The holidays are an exciting time of year for everyone. Here are some tips to help ensure a safe holiday season.

Trees
• When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label "Fire Resistant."
• When purchasing a live tree always check for freshness. A fresh tree is less of a fire hazard. Fresh trees are green, with needles that are hard to pull from branches and do not break easily. The trunk should be sticky with resin.
• When setting up a tree at home, cut a few inches off the trunk of your tree to expose fresh wood. This allows for better water absorption. Be sure to keep the stand filled with water, heated rooms can dry live trees out rapidly. • Place trees away from fireplaces, radiators or portable heaters, out of walkways, and don't allow it to block doorways.

Lights
• Make sure all lights you use outdoors have been certified for outdoor use. Plug all outdoor electric decorations into circuits with ground fault circuit interrupters. • Check all tree lights—even if they are new to make sure all the bulbs are working and that there are no frayed wires or loose connections. • Turn off all lights when you go to bed or leave the house.

Decorations
• Use only non-combustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree. Choose tinsel or artificial icicles of plastic or nonleaded metals. • Never use lighted candles on a tree or near other evergreens. Use non-flammable holders, and place candles where they won’t fall down. • In homes with small children, take care to avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable, keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach of children. Avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food that may tempt a child to eat them. • Remove wrapping paper, bags, ribbons and bows from tree and fireplace areas after gifts are opened. These items can pose suffocation and choking hazards to a small child, or can cause a fire if near flame.

Toy Safety
• Select toys to suit the age, abilities, skills and interest level of the receiver. Toys that are too advanced may pose safety hazards. • To prevent burns and electrical shocks don't give children, under age ten, a toy that must be plugged into an electrical outlet. • Strings and ribbons that are more than 12 inches in length could be a strangulation hazard. Remove them from toys before giving them to young children.

Visiting
• When traveling in the car make sure everyone is buckled up and stays that way. • Remember that homes you visit may not be childproofed. Watch for danger spots. • Traveling, visiting, getting presents, shopping, etc., can all increase a child's stress levels. Stick to children's usual eating and sleeping schedules as much as possible to help you and them enjoy the holidays and reduce stress.

Fireplaces
• Before lighting any fire, remove all greens, boughs, papers, and other decorations from fireplace area. Make sure the flue is open. • Do not burn wrapping papers in the fireplace they ignite suddenly and burn intensely.
Pets

• People food is not good for pets it can cause gastrointestinal upset. Do not give poultry bones to your pets, they can splinter and cause severe injury. Onions can be toxic to both dogs and cats. Chocolate can cause a fatal heart attack if ingested in large doses.

• During the holidays, pets may not understand why their usually quiet home is full of people and noise. Provide pets with a quiet place to retreat to help them be more at ease. Also, keep an eye on pets when doors are opening and closing frequently, upset pets may slip out in the commotion.

• Decorations usually mean extra cords and plugs -- tempting "chew toys" for pets. Take an extra minute or two during decorating to tape down or cover cords.

• Anchoring the top of the tree to the ceiling with a strong cord will help keep it in place around frolicking pets. Some pets are inclined to eat tinsel hanging from trees -- this can cause an intestinal obstruction – avoid tinsel or keep tinsel decorations high on the tree.

• Mistletoe and holly berries, as well as poinsettia plants can be poisonous to pets. Pine needles can puncture holes in a pet’s intestine causing an emergency visit to the vet. Use repellent sprays to keep pets away from areas and objects that may cause them harm.

Have a Safe and Happy Holiday!

Candy Cane Cookies

Ingredients

2/3 cup butter, softened
2/3 cup sugar
1 egg
1 egg yolk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 cups all purpose flour
½ teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons Red Food Coloring

Directions

Cream Butter in large mixing bowl, gradually adding sugar. Beat until light and fluffy. Add egg, egg yolk, vanilla, beat well. Mix four, soda, salt in small mixing bowl. Add to creamed mixture, stir well. Divide dough in half. Tint one-half with Red Food coloring. Wrap each half in wax paper. Chill 2 hours. Shape into long skinny ropes approximately 1/4 inch wide, six inches long, on a lightly floured surface. Place plain ropes and red ropes together, and twist gently. Place on greased cookie sheet and shape into candy canes.

Bake at 350 degrees for 10 -12 minutes. Cool lightly on cookie sheet and remove to wire rack. Yield 3 dozen.