

75 HEALTHY IDEAS FOR  
YOUR LIFE AND  
MARRIAGE THIS  
CHRISTMAS  
FREE EBOOK



# Introduction

Hi friend - The 6 weeks between Thanksgiving Day (in the U.S.) and New Year's Day are some of the busiest of the year for wives and moms. With extra shopping, cleaning, cooking and celebrating added to our already-busy schedules, we start to feel like the weight of the world is on our shoulders. It's enough to add a large dose of "bah humbug" to the season that should be the most joyous of the year.

*But I don't think it has to be that way.* Yes, the holiday season is going to be busy, but it doesn't have to be chaotic. And you don't have to be under chronic stress and pressure during the entire 6-week period. I believe that the Christmas season *can* be the most wonderful time of the year. It *can* be a time when you stay calm, take care of your health, and enjoy your marriage and family.

But, making those things happen takes a little bit of effort. And that's what this book is about. It's full of ideas to help you prioritize what's important, let go of the things that aren't, manage stress, eat well, take care of yourself, and invest in your marriage.

Take a few minutes to read through the book, and feel free to share it with friends. I hope it will inspire you with some healthy ideas for your life and marriage throughout the Christmas season.

A stylized, cursive logo in a light green color that reads "gaye".

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## Slow Down and Enjoy Christmas this Year

Let's be honest. The **6 weeks between “getting ready for Thanksgiving” and “putting away the Christmas decorations”** are some of the most tiring and stressful of the year. Most women feel exhausted just thinking about them.

But does it have to be this way? Does "the most wonderful time of the year" always have to turn into "the most stressful time of the year?" I don't think it does. At the very least, it doesn't have to become six weeks of total stress and complete fatigue. I think that we, as women, wives and mothers, **have the power to make it more wonderful and less stressful**. But we need to acknowledge and **understand that power, then harness it to benefit ourselves and our families**.

If you're yearning for **a holiday season that's more about family, fun and joy**, and less about obligations, money and stress, here are 5 things you can do to move in that direction. Consider taking these steps to enjoy the holidays now, before things really start to get crazy.

- **Figure out what you and your husband really want.** What does an ideal Thanksgiving, Hanukkah or Christmas look like to you? What does it look like to your husband? Talk about it openly and honestly, and listen to what he has to say. **Don't be surprised if your ideal holidays and his look very different.** For example, decorating the entire house may be important to you, but mean nothing to him. And watching football with his family after Thanksgiving dinner may get him in the holiday spirit, but bore you to tears. So **bring all of your hopes and expectations out in the open**, and encourage him to do the same.
- **Establish your priorities.** Now that you know what's important to both of you, establish priorities for your family. Make a list of the three or four things that are most important to each of you. Maybe for your husband it's spending relaxed time as a family and choosing gifts that will allow the family to have fun together. Maybe for you it's starting the holiday season with a clean, uncluttered house and entertaining small groups of friends. **Let each other know, "This is what's most important to me over the next few weeks."** Then agree to honor each other's priorities and make them happen. And recognize that, in doing this, each of you will probably have to forgo two or three of your "favorites." If you don't, you'll be right back to trying to do everything and driving yourself crazy.
- **Let go of things that don't fit your priorities. This is where things start to get difficult.** In order to create the kind of holiday season you and your husband envision for



your family, **some things will have to go**. You can't attend every event, accept every invitation, make every gift, create every craft, and decorate every inch of the house – not if you want to **relax a bit and enjoy the things you determined are most important**. Obviously, some activities are required – your children's Christmas program, your boss's holiday drop-in, shopping for gifts, cooking holiday meals. But some are not. So you may have to say no to your neighbor's dessert buffet, your aunt's Christmas cantata, your daughter's friend's skating party, or your sister-in-law's all-day shopping trip. Because you can't do everything, and this year **you want to do the things that will make the season fun, relaxing and memorable for your family**.

- **Plan the activities you really want to do.** Choose one or two activities that each family member especially enjoys and schedule them now. Put them on your calendar, because that's the only way to make sure they happen. (In addition, when other things come up, this strategy allows you to say, "Sorry, we already have something scheduled.") Maybe your son likes to go



for a hay ride and cut down the perfect Christmas tree, your daughter enjoys seeing the lights display at the local zoo, your husband wants to watch "It's a Wonderful Life" and drink hot chocolate, and you love for the entire family to bake cookies together. **Schedule those things and other favorite activities now**; that way, you're certain to make room for them in your busy schedule.

- **Ask for and accept help.** Chances are, your husband doesn't want you to drive yourself crazy over the next few weeks. And more than likely, he wants to help in ways that will prevent that from happening. **But you'll have to tell him what you need.** Yes, it would be great if he could just figure it out on his own, but he probably won't. Not because he's dumb, but because he's not you. So ask for help, then let him do what needs to be done. For example, for many years my husband has shopped for the Christmas gifts for our sons. We always talk about what we want to get for them, but then he does the shopping. Great - that's one less thing on my list. He's willing to help with other things too. I just need to **ask, then get out of the way and let him do those things**. Your husband is probably willing to do the same.

## Yes, You Can Take Care of Your Health

Although I love the idea of building healthy routines into my life, this probably isn't the time of year to add anything new. My goal for the next few weeks is to keep things on an even keel, and then kick my healthy routines into high gear in the New Year. And I want to encourage you to do the same. **Don't let the six weeks from Thanksgiving through New Year's Eve become an endless cycle of**

**bad health habits.** Instead, take some simple steps to take care of your body and health. You'll *look better and feel better*. Here are a few quick and easy tips for keeping things reasonably healthy over the next few weeks.

- **Go outside and take a brisk walk for 30 minutes every day.**
- **Play outside with your kids for 30 minutes.**
- **Spend a few minutes stretching every day** to de-stress your muscles and keep your body limber.
- **Don't munch mindlessly on holiday snacks and treats.** Decide which ones you really want to eat, then sit down and enjoy them. Avoid run-of-the-mill party foods, packaged cookies, and other high-calorie/low-enjoyment foods - save the calories for the delicious foods you love, the ones that make the holidays special.
- **Avoid fast food.** Plan ahead when you're going to be out shopping or running errands for hours and take some healthy snacks with you.
- **When you're at home, eat healthy, whole foods as often as possible.**
- **Sleep 7 - 8 hours almost every night.**
- **To protect your mental health, limit your exposure to difficult people.** Set boundaries that protect you and your family from getting drawn into someone else's drama, and don't let a difficult person control your family's schedule, frame of mind, or joy.

## **Yes, You Can Stay (Somewhat!) Calm**

While you can't eliminate all the stress of the season, you can control and manage much of it. Here are 6 strategies for creating a calmer Christmas season for you and your family this year:

- **Assess your schedule, plans and expectations.** What things are causing you the most stress? Are those things truly important, or could you let them go? For example, attending your children's school music program and planning Christmas dinner for your family are truly important, but finding perfect matching outfits for the Christmas Eve service and attending all of your neighbors' holiday parties probably are not. Take some time to identify the truly important things and to reconsider expectations that may be unrealistic. (You know, like my dream of serving a Christmas dinner that looks like it came from the pages of *Southern Living*!) If your goal is to enjoy a joyous, peaceful Christmas with your family, taking this step is essential.
- **Organize and prioritize your Christmas "to do" list.** Once you've established your priorities, make a list of the things you'll need to do to accomplish them. Put the most



important items higher on the list. Then use the list to plan your schedule for each day and week. Plan to accomplish most of your high-priority items before you devote much time to low-priority tasks. And try to group similar tasks, or those that can be done in the same location, together – you don't want to be running to the same mall or store 3 or 4 times if you can possibly avoid it.

- **Tackle one thing that's annoying you that can be done in 30 minutes or less.** This might be a Christmas thing, or it could be a regular thing (maybe something on your [Little Annoying Tasks List](#)). Either way, pick something that's bugging you, something you can accomplish in 30 minutes or less, and just do it. Try to do this once or twice a week, and enjoy the satisfaction of being done with something that's been weighing on your mind.
- **Make time for your marriage.** When things get crazy, it's easy to let your husband and marriage drop to the bottom of your "to do" list. But taking time to connect with him and spending time together can actually reduce your stress, rather than adding to it. And don't forget that sex is a great stress reducer! In addition, be sure to involve your husband in the Christmas plans and responsibilities, rather than becoming the "Christmas Commander" and



trying to do everything on your own. Sharing the burdens (and fun) of the season with him can reduce your stress level too.

- **Go outside and take a walk.** If you're too busy to take a walk every day, you're too busy. Really. A 30-minute walk is ideal, but a 15-minute walk is a good place to start.
- **Take care of yourself.** Take a warm bath, read a book for pleasure, listen to beautiful music, watch a relaxing TV show or movie - anything you enjoy that relaxes you. Again, if you're too busy to do this at least every other day, you're too busy. Cross some things off your to-do list or assign them to someone else.

## Yes, You Can Enjoy Your Marriage

It's hard to invest a lot of time and energy in your marriage during the Christmas season. Your to-do list, which seems long during the rest of the year, seems endless this time of year. But, it's important to give your marriage some of your time and energy, and to keep a few sparks alive. So try a few small tactics to keep intimacy alive and let your husband know that you haven't forgotten him.

- **Send your him 3 or 4 sexy texts during the day.** Follow up with a little something that evening.
- **Do something fun together, just the two of you.** Get off the "Christmas preparations carousel" for a few hours and just have some fun with your husband. If you really can't get

away from your Christmas list, do a few things on it together, then go out for dinner, coffee or a glass of wine.

- **Ask him to rub your feet with lotion.**
- **Give him a back or neck rub.**
- **Take a relaxing bath.** Alone or together, or take a shower together.
- **Light a candle in the bedroom and play some romantic music.**
- **Wear some fun Christmas lingerie.**
- **Go to bed at the same time most nights.**
- **Make love.**
- If you're just too tired or stressed to enjoy sex, **do something for him as a gift of love.** Make sure he feels like it's a gift to him, not a burden to you.
- **Exercise every day and eat well most of the time.** Yes, I say this all the time, but the link between feeling healthy/keeping your weight under control and feeling sexy is just too strong not to repeat over and over.

## 6 Gifts to Give Yourself and Your Family this Christmas

If the holidays often feel stressful to you, consider giving yourself and your family six special gifts this year. I can almost guarantee that **these gifts will bring you more joy** over the next few weeks than anything you will buy in a store.

- **Give yourself and your husband the gift of deciding.** Instead of just letting things happen this year, work with your husband to decide what the holidays should look like for your family. Go back to Chapter 1 and work through the five simple steps you and your husband can take to decide on the kind of holiday season you want and make it happen.
- **Give your children the gift of a mother who can relax and enjoy the season -** Your children don't care if everything is perfect; they want the time and attention of a mother who is relaxed and happy. So **let go of some things and enjoy your children's Christmas.** When our children were young, I stepped back from the Christmas dinner preparations (even though they were taking place in my kitchen!) and let my mom and sisters who didn't have children do the bulk of the work. I felt guilty, but I thought that enjoying our children on Christmas day was more important than spending the day in the kitchen. And my friend Christina at [Juggling Real Food and Real Life](#) has established an [Advent book and reading tradition](#) in her family that allows her to spend time relaxing with her children every evening of Advent. It's fantastic - I wish I had known about it when our boys were young enough to enjoy it!



- **Give your husband the gift of your time and presence** - Christmas preparations will grab all of your time and energy if you let them, and husbands often get pushed to the side. So make plans several times a week to enjoy spending time together. Do some of the Christmas errands together and turn them into a date, like doing some shopping for the kids and then going out for coffee or dessert. **Or do something fun or relaxing that has nothing to do with the season (sometime you just need a break from it!).** If you can't get out of the house, put the kids to bed and watch a Christmas movie or another favorite movie. And be sure to make time for sex regularly, remembering that [sex is about you too](#), not just your husband, and that it can be exactly the stress reducer you need!
- **Give yourself the gift of "enough"** - At some point in the season (long before December 24!) decide that you have done enough, bought enough, planned enough, and prepared enough. Yes, some things will still need to be done, but at some point you need to **start "gearing down" on preparations and "gearing up" on enjoyment.** Because, as we all know (but somehow struggle to remember), everything doesn't have to be perfect. As a matter of fact, everyone in the family will **enjoy the season more if things aren't perfect.**
- **Give your family the gift of outdoor activity.** Everyone needs exercise, so why not make it fun? Go outside almost every day as a family and walk, bike, hike, skate, sled, play soccer - whatever makes sense in your part of the country. The kids will burn off energy, you'll burn calories and reduce stress, and everyone will feel more relaxed.
- **Give yourself the gift of relaxation.** Don't work yourself into a state of exhaustion every day, then collapse into bed every night! **Take time at least every other day to do something that really relaxes you.** Take a long bath, read a book, take a walk, drink a glass of wine, watch a Christmas movie, or have a cup of coffee with a friend. And be sure to do at least [one simple thing to take care of your health](#) every day.

## 8 Holiday Hacks for a Simpler, Easier Christmas

Making decisions and prioritizing your time and energy are important, but sometimes it's the little things that can really save your sanity. If you're looking for small ways to simplify your life and keep things a little more manageable, here are eight "hacks" - ways of doing things a little simpler and easier - that can help:

- **Put the most important things on your calendar today!** Decide on the things you really want to do as a couple or a family, and *put them on your calendar now* – before it gets out of control. If I sound like a stuck record on this point, there's a reason. This simple step will help you keep things sane and manageable. So do it today!
- **Take a day to work on Christmas preparations by yourself.** Try to find one day when you can devote the entire day to Christmas preparations – shopping, cleaning, cooking, whatever you need to do – by yourself. I know this is hard to do, whether you work outside the

home or in the home caring for your children. But if you can figure out a way to do it, *you can accomplish so much in that one day!* So think about what it would take to make that happen. Consider taking a vacation day from work, swapping childcare with another mom, or enlisting your husband to keep the kids - anything that will allow you to spend 8 or 9 hours tackling a big chunk of your Christmas "to do" list.

- **Cook the turkey the day before your holiday meal.** My aunt always cooked her Thanksgiving or Christmas turkey the day before the holiday meal, and now I do it too. It saves a lot of hassle on a busy day and frees the oven for other dishes. Cook it, let it cool a bit, wrap it well and refrigerate it. The next day, slice it just before the meal, arrange the slices on a platter and warm it up.
- **Clear the counters, empty the dishwasher, and fill the sink with soapy water before you start baking or cooking.** When you're getting ready to bake Christmas cookies, make food gifts, or cook a holiday meal, take a few minutes to get organized first. Clear and wipe down the counters, empty the dishwasher, and fill the sink with hot, soapy water, so you can rinse or quickly wash items you'll need to reuse. These simple steps will save time, stress and clean-up hassles.
- **Shop online as much as possible.** A great way to reduce stress and save time is to shop online for as many gifts as possible. If you want to support local businesses too, then shop online for "big box" items and locally for unique and specialty items.
- **Make foil-lined baking sheets for kids to use when working on Christmas crafts or cookies.** Before working with children on Christmas crafts or baking projects, line large baking sheets with foil (those extra-wide rolls of foil work great for this). Then let each child work on a baking sheet to "contain" his or her project. (This is especially good for projects that involve glitter!) Cookies can be baked directly on the foil-lined sheets, and craft projects can be cleaned up by wrapping the mess up in the foil and throwing it away.
- **Make hot drinks for a crowd in a Crockpot.** When you're hosting a family dinner or holiday party, make wassail or hot chocolate in your Crockpot. For Christmas dinner, I make a simple wassail with apple juice, cranberry juice, oranges and spices. I serve it in a Crockpot set up away from the main cooking area, along with a few simple hors d'oeuvres. That way people can serve themselves a drink and some snacks without getting in the way of the dinner preparations!
- **To save time on regular family meals, cook double batches of as many things as possible.** Unfortunately, my family still expects regular meals, even when we're in the middle of Christmas preparations! Yours probably does too. It's extremely inconvenient! So whenever possible, cook a double batch and serve it for several meals or freeze half for another meal. Crockpot meals like [shredded beef](#) for tacos or sandwiches and pulled pork are easy to double, as are many [soup recipes](#).

- **Bonus hack just for fun - Make "Christmas dust!"** Grind traditional peppermint candy canes to powder in your blender or food processor and transfer it to a container that seals tightly. Use it to add a touch of peppermint to hot chocolate, coffee, cookies, cupcakes, ice cream, and yogurt! Kids will love adding "Christmas dust" to all of those foods and more!

## 4 Ways to Manage Your Weight during the Christmas Season

One of the things I want to plan well this year is how to manage my weight during the holidays. Because, let's face it, the next few weeks are **some of the toughest weeks of the year when it comes to eating well, controlling portions, avoiding mindless eating, and keeping emotional eating at bay.**

Tough, but not impossible. I think it's entirely possible to eat well, enjoy holiday foods, and prevent weight gain during this busy time of year. And it hinges on taking just four steps, none of which are difficult or complicated. Are you looking for a way to manage your weight too, as you navigate the next few weeks? If so, join me in taking these four steps to better health, less guilt and more peace of mind.

- **Don't allow the holiday season to become a six-week "eating season."** Yes, Thanksgiving, Hanukkah and Christmas provide *a lot* of opportunities to eat - at family dinners, parties, church events, shopping trips, and many others. But those events don't happen every day - many days between now and New Year's Day are normal work, school and family days. And most days that include special events don't require you to eat holiday foods all day long. **So don't let every day become a "holiday eating event,"** and don't assume that the next few weeks are a total loss with regard to managing your weight. Sure, you want to eat Christmas cookies at the neighborhood cookie exchange. But you don't have to eat them the day before, and the day after...and the day after the day after. And you want to eat dressing and mashed potatoes and sweet potatoes and pie for Christmas dinner. But you don't have to keep eating them in the days that follow - even if you have lots of leftovers. And just because someone brings holiday treats to the office or to your house, you don't have to keep eating them. Make a plan for eating normal, healthy meals and snacks on most days, and [do some prep that will allow you to eat well](#) in between the special meals and events.
- **Eat the holiday foods you really love, and avoid the ones you don't.** Everyone has favorite holiday foods. Two of mine are pumpkin pie and ginger cookies. (And dressing. And sweet potatoes.) Maybe for you it's your mother's Christmas cookies, your neighbor's homemade candy, or your special coconut cake. So **enjoy those foods, the ones that make the holidays special for you.** Eat them, savor them and don't feel guilty about them. (I, for example, will be enjoying pumpkin pie with real whipped cream on Thanksgiving and Christmas, and maybe a few days in between!) **But many holiday foods don't hold a**

**special place in your heart.** And some of them are worthless junk that doesn't deserve to be eaten. You know, like the packaged cookies your co-workers keep leaving in the break room? Or the candy your kids bring home from various parties? It's junk - and you don't need it. **So avoid those foods** (get rid of them if possible) and save the calories for the ones you really love.

- **Move your body every day.** Your body needs to move and be active every day of the year, but even more so during the holidays. **Regular physical activity helps you deal with some of the downsides of the holiday season**, including worry, fatigue, the "blues," and excess calories. It reduces stress, helps you feel energized, burns calories, and generally makes you feel great. At this busiest time of the year, **you'll think you don't have time for it. But make time** - it's worth it. You don't have to go to a gym or do anything complicated. Instead, fit movement into your day and combine it with other activities. Walk for 30 minutes at the mall before shopping, walk with your husband after dinner, walk while your kids are at soccer or choir practice, work out with a DVD before your day begins, ride bikes or take a hike as a family on the weekend, or visit a walk-through holiday lights display. Schedule time for moving on your calendar - **you deserve it, and you're worth the effort** it takes to make it happen!
- **Drink lots of water and eat real food most of the time.** Stay hydrated - it keeps you feeling great and helps your body function well. (Sometimes when you feel tired or hungry, you're actually dehydrated.) So carry water with you wherever you go, and keep a bottle or glass handy at home or work. If you don't like plain water, make fruit waters. I don't enjoy drinking water, so I have to remind myself frequently that my body needs it. And [eat as much real food as possible](#). When you're not enjoying your favorite holiday foods, eat primarily fruits, vegetables, lean protein, nuts, whole grains, and healthy fats.

## **12 Quick & Healthy Family Meals – For the Busiest Weeks of the Year**

Remember a couple of chapters ago when I mentioned that families still need regular meals, even though you're in the middle of Christmas preparations? Yeah, that sometimes becomes a problem. But these 12 quick, healthy meals can help you solve that problem and feed your family well while still checking things off your Christmas to-do list.

- **Chicken, beef or pork in the Crockpot** – Put enough boneless skinless chicken breasts, London broil roast, or pork tenderloin to feed your family two meals into your Crockpot. Add a little bit of water, broth or sauce of your choice. Cook all day and serve it sliced that evening with simple sides, like brown rice with butter and steamed green beans.

- **Next-day tacos** – The next day, shred the rest of the chicken, beef or pork, mix with salsa and make tacos. Serve with as many or as few toppings as you like – just shredded cheese and more salsa is fine if you're really short on time. Add some fruit on the side.
- **Mediterranean Chicken Wraps** – For this simple meal, grill or pan sauté boneless, skinless chicken breasts. When done, let them cool a bit, then slice thinly. Warm pita breads or flatbreads in the oven, microwave or skillet. Set out hummus, feta or other cheese, [salad dressing or vinaigrette](#), and as many vegetables as you have time to fix (lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, olives, etc.). Let each person make his or her own wrap. Serve with orange slices or other fruit.
- **Sauteed Chicken Breasts, Baked Sweet Potatoes and Quick Brown Rice** - Heat olive oil or salad dressing/marinade in a large skillet. Add enough boneless, skinless chicken breasts to serve your family. Brown on both sides, then cover and cook until done. While the chicken is cooking, put a pot of water on to boil, following the instructions for the amount of quick/instant brown rice you'll need. Pierce sweet potatoes several times and place in microwave. Cook on high for 10 minutes or until soft all the way through. When water is boiling, add rice and cook as directed (usually about 10 minutes). When sweet potatoes are done, cut them open or in half and add butter. (Cinnamon is a nice addition too.) Add butter, salt and pepper to taste to the rice.
- **Soup and Grilled Cheese.** If you have some homemade soup in the freezer, great. If not, keep several cans or boxes of good-quality soups on hand, the kinds that include primarily real food ingredients. Organic is great; even though it's expensive, it's not as expensive as going out to dinner on a busy evening! While the soup is heating, make sandwiches with whole wheat bread and real cheese and toast them in a pan with some olive oil or butter. Serve with carrot sticks, grapes, or apple slices.
- **Whole Wheat Pasta with Cheese and Pick-up Vegetables.** Put a pot of water on to boil. While it's heating, grate your family's favorite cheese. (We like extra sharp cheddar on pasta.) Then start pulling together a plate of pick-up vegetables - baby carrots or carrot sticks, cherry tomatoes, slices of cucumber, strips of red or orange pepper, whatever you have on hand. When the water boils, add enough whole wheat pasta to serve your family and cook according to the package directions. Drain the pasta and add butter or olive oil to coat lightly and salt to taste. Divide among plates and top with grated cheese. Place the vegetable plate on the table and allow family members to choose from it.
- **Homemade Sloppy Joes** – Almost everyone loves Sloppy Joes, but the versions you make with a packet or can sometimes include ingredients you don't want to eat. So Christina at Juggling Real Food and Real Life has created perfect [Homemade Sloppy Joes in the Crockpot](#). You can put together the meat mixture in the morning and let it cook all day, or make it on the weekend to reheat on busy weekdays.

- **Black Beans and Quick Brown Rice with Sliced Fruit.** Heat olive oil in a large saucepan or Dutch oven. Coarsely chop an onion and saute it in the olive oil. While the onion cooks, open cans of black beans (enough for your family) plus one or two cans of diced tomatoes. Rinse and drain the beans. In the meantime, start water for brown rice heating in another pot, according to the package directions. Add beans and tomatoes to cooked onions, and season according to your family's tastes (salt, pepper, Italian seasoning, cumin, chili powder, Tabasco, etc.). Cook for 10 minutes. Add rice to boiling water and cook as directed (usually about 10 minutes). While the beans and rice cook, slice oranges, apples or whatever fruit you have on hand. Serve beans on top of rice, with fruit on the side.
- **Scrambled Eggs, Whole Wheat Toast and Fruit.** Breakfast for dinner can be quick and healthy. Cut up whatever fruit you have on hand - even apples and bananas are fine - and make a simple fruit salad, crack enough eggs to serve your family and mix with a bit of milk, salt and pepper. Whisk together (a stick blender does this really quickly). Melt butter in a large skillet and scramble eggs. While eggs are cooking, begin making toast. Butter it as it comes out of the toaster and put it in the oven to keep warm. Serve eggs, toast with jam or fruit spread and fruit salad. (My friend Christina at Juggling Real Food and Real Life has [great tips for enjoying real food breakfasts for dinner](#).)
- **Spaghetti.** Keep several jars of high-quality spaghetti sauce on hand - look for brands that contain primarily tomatoes and just a few other ingredients - and little or no sugar. (Some spaghetti sauces list sugar as the second or third ingredient!) Or make a big batch of your own one weekend and freeze dinner-size portions that you can grab on hectic days. While whole grain spaghetti is cooking, make a simple salad or cut up vegetables for a simple veggie plate with some salad dressing on the side as a dip.
- **Chicken Fajitas with Fruit.** Heat olive oil in a large skillet. Add enough boneless, skinless chicken breasts for your family and cook until done. Remove from pan to a cutting board to cool slightly. While chicken is cooking, slice onions and red/orange/yellow peppers. Add more olive oil to the pan and saute vegetables. Grate cheese (or, even better, take previously-grated cheese out of the refrigerator or freezer). Slice apples, oranges or other fruit. When chicken is cool enough to handle, cut into strips. Place sliced chicken and cooked peppers and onions on a large platter and cheese in a bowl. Warm whole wheat tortillas in the microwave. Open a jar of salsa. Place all the ingredients on the table and let each person make his or her own fajitas. Serve with fruit.
- **Chili in the Crockpot** – Nicky at Little Family Adventure has a great recipe for [Sweet Potato and Black Bean Chili](#) that you put together in the morning and cook all day in your Crockpot. This is a vegetarian recipe that allows you to serve a delicious meatless meal while still keeping your meat eaters happy. You can use canned black beans (rinse them) and canned chopped tomatoes in this recipe to save even more time. (By the way, Nicky has a lot of [weekly meal plans](#) that are perfect for busy families.)

## 16 Fun, Healthy and Sexy Things to Do between Christmas and New Year's Day

The week between Christmas and New Year's Day always seems a bit strange, doesn't it? It's not a regular week, but it's not exactly a vacation week either. The kids are out of school, many parents are off work, and normal routines are nowhere to be found. In addition, the excitement of Christmas is over, which can lead to everyone feeling a bit "down." On the other hand, it can be a great week for getting things organized for the new year and enjoying some relaxed time as a couple and a family. Here are 15 fun, healthy and sexy things that can make this one of the best weeks of the year.

### Fun

- **See a movie in the theater.** If you watch most of your movies at home (we do!), consider seeing a new release in the theater. In order to save money, see a matinee and plan a special treat at home afterwards, rather than buying expensive movie theater snacks.
- **Visit a holiday attraction you didn't have time to see before Christmas.** The holiday lights displays and other attractions at many parks and zoos continue in the week after Christmas. Check out one of them and then head to your favorite coffee shop or make some hot chocolate at home.
- **Enjoy an outdoor activity.** As soon as the sun comes out, go outside for some outdoor fun. Being in the sun, even when it's cold, makes everyone feel better. My husband and I like to check the weather forecast to pick the best day to head to a state park for some hiking. Based on your climate and local resources, consider ice skating, sledding, biking, walking, hiking, or just visiting a park or playground.
- **Try something new.** Variety is the spice of life, so add a little spice to your life this week. Try something new - on your own, with your husband or as a family. Visit a new restaurant, check out a local attraction, try a new hobby, enjoy a new book, serve others in a new way - anything you've been thinking about but haven't yet had a chance to try.
- **Be a "kid" with your kids.** Take some time to enjoy your children on their terms this week. Set aside your adult responsibilities for a little while and do something they want to do. You may feel like you don't have time to color, build with Legos, throw pitches, enjoy a tea party, style hair (or receive a new hair style!), listen to music, dance or jump rope. Do it anyway, and allow yourself to enjoy it.

### Healthy

- **Decide when you're going to stop eating holiday food.** Let's admit it - most of us have been eating poorly for the past week or so. That's fine, it's part of celebrating Christmas. But, very soon, it will be time to cut out the holiday food and get back to (or get started on) a healthy

eating plan. So pick a day when you plan to stop eating eating pie, cookies, dressing and gravy and DO IT.

- **Get rid of the things you don't want to eat.** It's hard to stick with a healthy eating plan when your kitchen is still loaded down with Christmas treats. So when you're ready to stop eating them, get rid of them. Give them away, freeze them or (gasp!) throw them away. Seriously, at some point, you just don't need to have them around.
- **Move your body every day this week.** Do something every day that gets you up and moving. Walk, dance, hop on the treadmill, dust off the gym membership, play soccer with the kids, stretch, pop in an exercise DVD, or do [exercises you can do almost anywhere](#).
- **Catch up on sleep.** Most women don't get enough sleep, and Christmas preparations exacerbate their sleep deficit. This week, be intentional about sleeping at least 7-8 hours each night. Adequate sleep makes you feel like a new woman. It also boosts your immune system, a big bonus as we head into the [winter "sickness season."](#)
- **Begin making your healthy living plans for the new year.** What do you want to change or improve this year? Begin the year with one or two changes in mind - things you can take specific steps to change and expect to see a real difference. Here's a list of [12 healthy strategies](#) you might want to consider.

## Sexy

- **Play some sexy/romantic Christmas music.** So, you didn't have time to enjoy sexy music while shopping, wrapping, baking and cooking? Me either. Then enjoy it this week. J of Hot, Holy and Humorous has done all the work of creating [intimate playlists](#) for us. All we have to do is enjoy!
- **Break out the Christmas lingerie.** You know, the Mrs. Santa teddy that's been in the back of your closet since last year? (Wait, you don't have one of those?) Or just a red bra and panties. Don't have any Christmas lingerie? This is the perfect time to buy some, because it's on sale and stores are eager to get rid of it.
- **Try something new.** This week, try something new with your husband. A new location, new position, new activity - it doesn't have to be a dramatic change, just something a little bit different. Even sex at a different time of day can be fun. For example, if morning sex is out of the question during normal school and work weeks, give it a try this week when you have a bit more time.
- **Increase the amount of sex and intimacy.** For this week, consider being intimate with your husband more often. Whatever is typical for the two of you, just crank it up a notch. That doesn't mean you have to make love every day (although you could!), just that you increase the level of intimacy and sexual contact in whatever way works for the two of you.
- **Instigate.** I love the word "instigate." (It's one of my ["3 words that can transform your sex life."](#)) It's related to "initiate," which is good too, but it goes a bit further. When you instigate

in your sex life, you celebrate God's gift of sex and intimacy. You show yourself and your husband that you enjoy (or are striving to enjoy) sex. You take charge just a bit, and try something you want to try. So surprise your husband, and maybe yourself, by instigating something sexy at least once this week.

More healthy ideas for your life and marriage at [Calm.Healthy.Sexy](http://Calm.Healthy.Sexy).

## *Merry Christmas*

Isaiah 9:6-7 (NIV)

<sup>6</sup>For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
<sup>7</sup>Of the greatness of his government and peace  
there will be no end.  
He will reign on David's throne  
and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it  
with justice and righteousness  
from that time on and forever.  
The zeal of the LORD Almighty  
will accomplish this.