



**December 2014**

Dear Homemakers,

As the end of another year draws to a close, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks to any and all who volunteered their time and talents to help make our community events throughout the year a success. I would like to wish you and your loved ones a Joyous Holiday and a Happy and Healthy New Year!

Sincerely,

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## Prairie Fare: Limit Your Holiday Stress

By: Julie Garden-Robinson, NDSU Extension Food & Nutrition Specialist

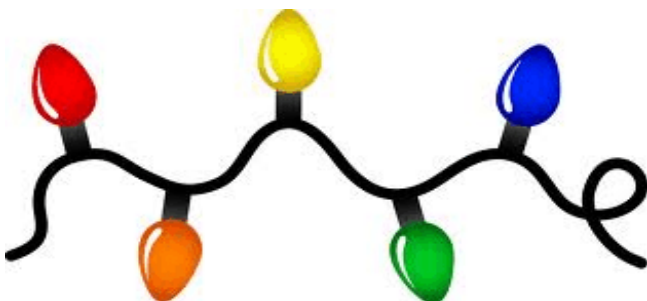
Stress is inevitable in life. Some stress is okay because it braces us to cope with threats. We may breathe faster, our pulse may quicken and our muscles may tense, just as the bodies of our distant ancestors reacted to dangers generations ago.

Sometimes stress is fleeting and passes when we figure out how to cope with the situation. Other times, serious stress, such as the loss of a loved one or loss of a job, can lead to physical and/or mental health issues. For example, prolonged stress can promote the development of high blood pressure and heart disease.

Simplifying expectations, eating a healthful diet, getting plenty of exercise and scheduling time for relaxation can help you cope with the situation. Be sure to see a qualified health-care professional for other options.

Here's a list of holiday food ideas to keep your recipes fun, healthful, safe and fairly simple.

- \* Keep the celebration simple. How about a soup, bread and salad potluck? If some of your guests do not have time to cook, could they help organize or assist with cleanup?
- \* Have fun with your menu ideas. Be sure to feature fruits, vegetables, whole grains and other healthful foods such as red and green apple wedges with lemon yogurt dip, parfaits made by layering nonfat vanilla yogurt with frozen red berries, pomegranate seeds sprinkled over kiwi slices or spinach dip served with red and green pepper strips and whole-grain pita chips.
- \* Slim your recipes. Choose lower-fat versions of your ingredients, such as "light" cream cheese. If you are making a dip, substitute plain, nonfat yogurt for the mayonnaise or sour cream. Choose baked chips instead of fried.
- \* Remember food safety for holiday gatherings. Perishable food, such as cut fruit and vegetables, salads, meats and casseroles, should spend no more than two hours at room temperature. Use a slow cooker to hold hot foods hot. Keep food warm in the oven until you serve it. Keep cold foods cold by making an "ice nest" by setting bowls or plates of food inside or on top of bowls of ice to help keep the food cold. Replace the ice if it melts.
- \* Make activity part of the celebration. Organize a sledding party. If it's too cold outdoors, make room for dancing indoors.
- \* Explore some new recipes. Visit <http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/food> and click on "recipes" for hundreds of foods in categories such as appetizers, soups, breads and main dishes. Check out all the nutrition resources and videos, too.



## **Prairie Fare: Last-Minute Thoughtful Gifts Make the Recipient's Day**

By: Julie Garden-Robinson, NDSU Extension Food & Nutrition Specialist

You don't have to spend a lot of money to give a thoughtful gift, but be sure to budget for the holidays. If you don't track your spending, those January credit card bills can be painful. Some financial experts say to stick with 1 to 1.5 percent of your annual income for holiday spending. For example, if your family makes \$25,000 per year, 1 percent would be \$250 (.01 times 25,000).

After you have decided on your budget, figure out how much to spend on each person. As the holidays get closer, often the prices get lower. Take advantage of the sales and consider shopping online. Be sure to track what you spend in whatever way works the best for you, whether it's a notepad, computer spreadsheet, receipts in an envelope or an app on your phone. Write down the total you plan to spend per person at the top of the page and subtract as you buy items.

Maybe one of your friends likes to bake, and you like to sew. How about sewing an apron from the fabric you have on hand? You could give a gift of your time with free babysitting, snow shoveling, window washing or cleaning.

Theme baskets, such as a movie night with a DVD, popcorn and beverage mix, are popular, too.

Maybe you have a special skill and also like to teach. Offer a free cooking or baking lesson for a family favorite, such as lefse or kuchen.

How about some gifts that promote health and wellness? Here are a few of my top picks that won't bust your budget but might make the recipient a little healthier in the long run.

\* A food thermometer. You can buy a wide variety of thermometers ranging from digital to dial gauge. Food thermometers promote safe food, as well as high-quality food. When you avoid overcooking food, you can maintain the juiciness and tenderness of your favorite meats. Visit <http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/food> and click on "food safety" for free resources to include with the thermometer.

\* A pedometer. These step counters are good motivators to get your physical activity. Adults need at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week. About 10,000 steps is the equivalent of five miles of daily walking, and you can work up to this goal. Walking reduces stress and the risk of several chronic diseases, including heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

\* A color-coded green cutting board and some salad recipes. Most of us have some well-used cutting boards ready for disposal, so we could use a new one. Cutting boards with grooves from frequent chopping can be difficult to clean and sanitize. Some new color-coded cutting boards can help you avoid cross-contamination, too. Use a green cutting board for vegetables and fruits, a yellow one for poultry and a red one for meat.

\* A gift certificate for a pair of good-quality sunglasses and a container of SPF 30 sunscreen for outdoor activities. You can get a sunburn in the winter, so take care of your skin, even if only part of your face is showing in the cold weather. Getting out for an afternoon of skiing, sledding or skating is a fun way to burn some calories and prevent winter weight gain.

If you are looking for a quick and easy gift, fill pint-sized jars with a beverage mix. Add a piece of fabric over the lid, apply the screw band and a ribbon, and you have a festive gift. The NDSU Extension Service has a variety of beverage and bread mix recipes. Visit <http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/food> (click on "food preparation").

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Here's one of the mixes from our "beverage mixes in a jar" publication.

### ***French Vanilla Coffee Mix***

1/2 c. instant coffee  
1 c. instant skim milk powder  
1/2 c. powdered nondairy coffee creamer  
1/3 c. white sugar  
1/4 c. French vanilla instant pudding mix

Add the ingredients to a food processor. Pulse until thoroughly mixed and you have a smooth powder. Store mixture in an airtight, pint-sized container. Decorate container as desired.

*Makes 16 servings. Each serving has 50 calories, 1 gram (g) of fat, 2 g of protein, 10 g of carbohydrate, 0 g of fiber and 65 milligrams of sodium.*

If you can make this as a drink mix, add a tag with this information:

Directions: For each serving, place 3/4 cup boiling water in a mug and stir in 2 heaping tsp. of mix.





**We've Been JOY-ed!**



## You Have Been JOY-ed!

Acts of kindness are on the sly.  
In fact, this came from friends close by!  
The treats you have with this short note  
Are yours to keep. Enjoy them both!

JOY has been left on your front door.  
Pass it on for delights galore.  
Neighbors will have smiling faces.  
Who can guess who's "JOY-ed" which places?

Give a gift but keep it quiet.  
Treats welcome; forget the diet.  
It's official, the season's here.  
So spread the JOY and share the cheer!

Please keep JOY spreading by following these directions:

- Cut out and place the JOY sign on your front door or in a visible window.
- Make two copies of this note and the JOY sign.
- Make two treat bags or JOY baskets.
- Secretly deliver the gift, directions, and JOY sign to two neighbors who haven't been JOY-ed yet. Keep an eye on your neighbors' front doors to see how far the JOY is spreading.

## Prairie Fare: Put on Your Baking Scientist Hat

By: Julie Garden-Robinson, NDSU Extension Food & Nutrition Specialist

Yes, holiday baking season is upon us and cookies often top the list of holiday food traditions. Of course, you can buy cookies readily in grocery stores, but they usually do not taste the same as homemade.

The word cookie comes from the Dutch word "koekje," which means "little cake." According to food historians, bakers would bake a small amount of cake batter to test the oven temperature.

While growing up, my relatives often made cookies associated with our Scandinavian heritage. I remember the deep-fried rosettes dipped in sugar. They looked like crispy flowers. I especially liked the krumkake, which were made with a special iron and rolled into a tube.

If you decide to bake this year, put on your mathematician's hat and your scientist lab coat. Actually, tying back your hair if you have long hair and putting on an apron will suffice.

Baking is an effective way to teach kids about measuring and the functions of ingredients while having fun in the process. If you are doubling or tripling recipes, you may want to get out a piece of paper and write down the new recipe. Double-check the math to avoid culinary disasters.

Incorrect measurements and mixing can affect your final product. If you add too much of a particular ingredient, such as flour, your end product may have a dry, crumbly texture. If you use too little baking powder or soda, your baked good might not rise properly. If you mix cookies too much, you may develop the gluten (protein) in the flour and get a tough cookie instead of a tender one.

In preparation for baking season, try this little quiz about measuring.

1. This ingredient should be spooned into a measuring cup and then leveled off with the back of a knife.
2. This ingredient should be packed in a measuring cup. The ingredient should hold its shape when placed in the mixing bowl.
3. Your recipe calls for 2 cups of butter. How many sticks of butter should you use?
4. Your recipe calls for 1/2 pint of cream. How many cups is that?
5. When you measure these types of ingredients, you should bend down and look at them at eye level.

The answers:

1. Flour should not be dipped. It should be spooned in and leveled.
2. Brown sugar should be firmly packed, unless the recipe says otherwise.
3. Use four sticks of butter for 2 cups because each stick is 1/2 cup of butter.
4. One-half pint of cream is equal to 1 cup.
5. Liquid ingredients, such as water and oil, should be measured using a liquid measuring cup. Set the measuring container on a countertop and view at eye level.

Enjoy holiday treats in moderation to avoid New Year's weight loss resolutions.

Visit <http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/food> for more seasonal mixes for soups and other baked goods.



### **Holiday Recipe Corner**

*I found this recipe on the website [www.roxanashomebaking.com](http://www.roxanashomebaking.com). I made it for a 4-H meeting and it was a hit! Enjoy!*

#### **Carmelitas**

##### *Ingredients:*

*1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour*  
*2 cups quick-cooking oats (if using rolled oats, pulse them for few seconds in the food processor)*  
*1 1/2 cups light brown sugar*  
*1 teaspoon baking soda*  
*1/4 teaspoon salt*  
*1 cup butter, melted*  
*14 ounce vanilla caramels, unwrapped*  
*1/3 cup heavy cream*  
*2 cups (12 ounces) semisweet chocolate pieces*  
*1 cup (6 ounces) unsweetened baking chocolate, chopped*  
*1 cup chopped pecans*  
*Optional:*  
*5-6 caramels (I used caramel ice cream topping)*  
*1/3 cup chocolate chips*

##### *Instructions:*

*Heat the oven to 350-degrees F. Line a 13x9x2-inch baking pan with parchment paper, leaving about 1 inch of paper hanging on the sides. Set aside.*

*In a mixing bowl, combine flour, oats, brown sugar, soda, and salt. Stir in the melted butter and mix until crumbly.*

*Press half of the mixture on the bottom of the prepared pan. Sprinkle with the chopped pecans and chocolate (both the chips and chopped one) over the crust.*

*In a small saucepan, combine caramels and heavy cream. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly until melted and smooth.*

*Pour the caramel in the pan, over the chocolate and pecans.*

*Crumble the reserved oatmeal cookie dough over the caramel layer.*

*Bake for 23 minutes or until light golden brown.*

*Cool completely in pan on a wire rack.*

*Once cooled, melt both the remaining caramels and chocolate chips and drizzle over the bars.*