

## Holiday Kick Off : A Super Issue

As I write this, and perhaps, as you read it, Halloween is a few days away, and Thanksgiving is coming up, with Christmas, Hanukah, and New Year's Eve right behind.

Remember when after Halloween hay rides and trick or treating, ads for turkey came out, along with plans for football homecomings and family gatherings?

The day after Thanksgiving was magical because, overnight, the stores turned into winter wonderlands of lights, trees, and decor. There was no such thing as Black Friday. Nativity scenes were everywhere and along with Christmas cards, and religious preparations, we looked forward to the first carols on the radio.

Fast forward to 2008, and by August, the stores are clearing out summer clothes and garden supplies, while cramming Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas items into every available square inch.

Each holiday 's special personality has turned into one giant mushed up pot of commercialization. Many of us feel more pressured than excited. Buy! Make! Do! Decorate!

Because of this holiday rat race, in addition to some good fall health information, and holiday recipes, I want to give you some food for thought regarding the holiday season, and ideas on how you can take control and reduce the stress that build up between now and 2009.

I have filled this special issue with extra easy recipes that I think you will enjoy, a great guest article on keeping your pet healthy and safe during the holidays, and much more. Staying healthy is always on our minds as the cold and flu season gets started, too, so I have included a page of tips dedicated just to this topic. My special section on getting ready for the holidays comes to you from another guest author. Though it deals with Christmas, I am including it now because so much of it can be applied to Thanksgiving, and it could help you with the choices you must make now regarding how you will spend your holiday time and money.

Many of us are already looking for practical ways to reduce our spending, improve our families' wellbeing, and salvage our sanity this holiday season. I hope you find plenty of support and ideas in the next few pages.

Finally, you will find some Thanksgiving tradition trivia tucked into little spots all through this issue. The answers are on the last page.



#1- Which 8 countries have an official Thanksgiving holiday?

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#2-The observation of Thanksgiving once ceased for 45 years in the USA. Which president resumed the tradition?

## I Think You Should Know . . .

The diseases that we fear most and that cause the most deaths in our adult population, such as cardiovascular disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer's, arthritis, and macular degeneration are all considered 75-95% preventable by optimizing nutrition and improving lifestyle habits.

High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS) raises triglycerides, and impacts leptin and insulin hormones, which in turn prevent the body from controlling appetite or glucose correctly, and contribute to development of diabetes, obesity, and cardiovascular disease.

The new "HFCS is safe" TV ads are paid for by the Corn Refiners Association, Pepsi, and other groups who stand to profit by our billion dollar taste for soft drinks.

The average American consumes 57 pounds of (HFCS) each year, mostly in the form of soft drinks and fruit flavored drinks. (also in breads, ketchup, mayonnaise, yogurts, infant formula, and more)

MSG (monosodium glutamate) is used to create obesity in laboratory mice and rats. It is the most common food additive in fast food and processed food in the US. More on this next month.

According to the EPA, 96 billion pounds of food waste is thrown away each year in the US.

The RDI (Recommended Dietary Intake) is the minimum amount needed to prevent deficiency disease in the average healthy person. The amount for optimum health is usually much higher.

#3-Who declared the first national day of "thanksgiving and prayer" to be on November 26 and when?

Answers on pg. 12

### **Gardasil: the Human Papillomavirus Vaccine shocks and scares me!**

Why are we allowing our young girls to be used as human guinea pigs in one of the most potentially dangerous vaccines yet to be developed? There is no scientific doubt that the use of any type of agent which affects the human reproductive system can have profound and devastating long term effects. Yet, Merck was able to put this vaccine on the market with no long term study.

Since the initiation of vaccination in young girls and women in 2006, nearly ten thousand reports of serious side effects have been made to the FDA Vaccine Adverse Event Report System and include blood clotting and heart problems, Bells Palsy, Guillain-Barre Syndrome, seizures, and an increase in miscarriages and birth defects in vaccinated women who become pregnant.

At least 25 women have died, most due to blood clot related events.

Investigations into the safety of the vaccine has begun in several countries.

It is now required by females ages 11-24 who apply for US residency. You should know that the development of this vaccine paralleled the research into permanent contraceptive vaccines. The discovery of known "sterilizing" agents in certain common vaccines has been reported by a number developing nations including Mexico, the Philippines, several African nations, as well as Argentina.

**Please warn everyone you know who has daughters to research this vaccine very seriously and very thoroughly before they consider it. Absolutely no one knows what the long term result of this real-life experiment will be.**

Let me remind you that today's participants are tomorrow's statistics; they could be heart breaking.

Please watch for the full article on this vaccine in the December/January issue.

The information contained in this newsletter is not intended as diagnosis, prescription, or treatment for any illness or disease, physical or mental, not is it intended to be a substitute for regular medical care from a licensed physician.

## Stay Healthy This Winter

Some people seem to spend months coming down with one thing after the other. Then, there are “lucky” people who never get sick. I can tell you that it’s rarely “luck”. A combination of advantages allows them to stay healthy most of the time, and recover quickly on the few occasions when they do catch something.

Experts agree that it is only a matter of time before we are hit with a major flu epidemic or a serious strain of cold virus that will create a crisis of unknown severity. I believe it is vital to protect yourself now by creating a healthy immune system and learning how to defend your body and family from these viruses.

Regarding flu vaccination, please use caution! Make an *informed* choice based on your personal risk issues. **I am not a proponent of flu vaccinations for healthy infants, children, or adults**, for several reasons. Some are beyond the scope of this article, but include these:

— **Flu vaccines provide protection against only a few of the 200 circulating viruses.** Makers must guess, many months in advance, which viruses to target.

— **Flu shots have not been shown to impact mortality in any age group, including the elderly.**

The percentage of vaccinated Americans has risen substantially in recent years, while the percentage of flu related deaths has remained the same. **Over 50 studies show that the vaccine is no better than placebo for the 6-24 month old infants now being targeted.** (These studies have been published in The New England Journal of Medicine, The American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine, The Lancet, and others.)

— **Many of the ingredients in the flu vaccine itself, (injectables or mists) are not substances I consider safe, or want injected into my body: formaldehyde, thimerosal (mercury), monosodium glutamate, ethylene glycol (antifreeze), aluminum, sodium phosphate, octoxinol-9 (spermicide!), a variety of antibiotics such as streptomycin and neomycin, and other equally questionable substances.**

— **Different manufacturers have different formulas but all are chicken embryo or egg derived, so anyone with egg allergies or sensitivities should avoid vaccinations.**

— **There are serious potential side effects of any vaccination for every age group; some can result in cumulative and permanent damage. The “it couldn’t hurt” mentality is erroneous.**

The bottom line is that I have more confidence in the body’s immune system, and I think you should, too. By strengthening your immune system naturally, and practicing some easy, common sense habits, you can protect yourself from hundreds of cold and flu viruses as well as a wide variety of bacterial illnesses.

It goes without saying that eating healthy food, avoiding sugar, and increasing antioxidants is important. Homemade chicken soup has finally been proven to help the body fight illness, and tea with lemon and honey helps ease a sore throat. Apples, garlic, onion, and other common foods are effective germ fighters.

Many essential oils, like eucalyptus, for example, have potent antimicrobial properties that are effective against colds and flu when breathed in or used to disinfect. *Caution: Learn how to use them safely !*

The temperature, moisture level, and allergen levels in your house or workplace matter, too.

Regular exercise, reducing stress, and socializing with friends are also very important for staying healthy.

Here are my top recommendations.

**1—Boost your levels of natural vitamin D3. The immune system cannot function without it. People with the highest levels of D have the lowest rates of colds, flu, and respiratory illness.**

**2—Get enough sleep. One *night* of insufficient sleep results in a *week* of impaired immune function.**

**3—Wash your hands often with mild soap and warm water. Use essential oil or alcohol based waterless hand sanitizers when needed, to kill germs without helping create “superbugs.”**

**4—Drink plenty of pure water every day. Be conscious about staying well hydrated during the winter.**

**5—Consider taking vitamin C, zinc, elderberry, and homeopathic remedies to shorten or avoid illness if you feel you are coming down with something.**

*Want to know more?* Come to my “Stay Healthy This Winter” Seminar on Nov. 6. The topics mentioned above will be covered in depth, and I will tell you about several little known tips that you might find of great interest and use. Registration information is on my website FYI page, or call 423-367-1396.

## From My Kitchen : One Pot Meals

If ever there was a time when it's easiest to succumb to stopping for a fast food meal, it's now that the craziness of the holidays has begun. If you want to avoid illness and unwanted weight gain, and want to feel energetic and healthy, a little bit of planning ahead can go a long way. Start by stocking your kitchen, and maybe your vehicle with some basic ingredients and snacks. If you have shopping or errands to run, make a planned meal stop where you can eat real food. Each of these recipes should feed four easily, and by keeping a couple a good loafs of bread in the freezer, you can have a comforting meal ready within the hour with little time in the kitchen.

**Mediterranean Chicken Couscous** takes about 10-12 minutes to prepare, and another 45 minutes baking and resting. For a meatless version, omit the chicken and reduce the bake time to 25 minutes. You could stir in some cubes of feta cheese after serving for added flavor and nutrition.

4 TBS of olive oil  
1 cup dry couscous  
1 cup water  
1 tsp salt  
3/4 cup ripe, pitted olives of choice, sliced  
Four pieces of chicken (breasts or thighs)  
1 tsp. lemon pepper  
1 onion  
1 cup sliced zucchini, yellow squash, or mushrooms  
2-3 med. Tomatoes, cut in wedges  
1 red bell pepper, cut in strips  
1/2 cup pine nuts  
1/2 tsp. dried basil  
1 tsp dried oregano  
2 TBS lemon juice

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Pour 2TBS of the olive oil into a heavy (cast iron type) Dutch oven. Pour the couscous into the pot, add 1 cup of water and spread the mixture as evenly as possible. Lay the pieces of chicken on top of the couscous and season with half of the salt and lemon pepper. Add layers of olives, pine nuts, bell pepper, tomatoes, onions, and avocados. Sprinkle the rest of the salt and lemon pepper over it all. You can add 1/4 cup of dry white wine if desired. Sprinkle in the rest of the ingredients. Cover and put into the oven, and bake for 35 minutes. (a little more if the chicken pieces are very large) Remove from oven and let rest for 10 minutes. Uncover, serve the vegetables & chicken and fluff up the layer of couscous with a fork before spooning it out.

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**Chickpea Stew** is a quick vegetarian friendly dish. It will only take you about 30 minutes, start to finish.

2TBS olive oil  
2 tsp. cumin seeds  
5 cloves garlic, minced  
1 medium onion, chopped (red is best)  
1 TBS ground coriander seeds  
2 cups water  
2 drained cans of chickpeas (15-20 oz)  
2 medium potatoes, cut into bite size chunks (red is best)  
2 medium tomatoes, cut into bite sizes  
Salt and pepper to taste  
4 TBS chopped cilantro

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over med. high heat, and add cumin seeds, stirring them for about 10 seconds. Add the garlic and onion, and stir until well browned for another 5-8 minutes. Add coriander, and cook for 10-20 seconds more. Now stir in the water, chickpeas, tomato, and potato, and 2 TBS of the cilantro. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to simmer, cover and cook until the potato is tender, about 10-15 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste and stir in the last of the cilantro right before serving.

## From My Kitchen : Holiday Extras

Here are two recipes that you might want to consider putting on your table this year. My cranberry relish is a crunchy change from the usual cranberry sauce and has become a family favorite. The maple glazed autumn mélange is a new dish that I developed and plan to serve for the first time this Thanksgiving. I think it's so yummy, even people who don't usually like these vegetables might become converts. (My family did!) Try it! I think you'll agree. And please, let me know what your family thought of both recipes.

**Cranberry Orange Nut Relish** is really quick ( 10 minutes tops!) and easy, but should be made no more than 6 hours before serving to prevent it from becoming bitter. A food processor is the only way I know of to make this properly. **Please use organic fruits since you will be eating the entire fruits, including their peels!**

1 pound washed whole fresh cranberries (frozen whole berries can be processed without thawing them out)  
1 cup walnuts  
1 large (or 2 small) oranges, cut into 1 inch chunks, with seeds removed  
3/4 cup sugar plus added sugar or stevia to sweeten to taste.

Makes enough for 6-8 servings

Put the orange pieces (peel and all!) into the processor cup and pulse repeatedly until chopped into 1/2 inch pieces. Add the rest of the ingredients and pulse again until you have a relish consistency with plenty of 1/4 inch pieces. Taste and sweeten a little more if needed. Cranberries are very tart, and this is one time when sugar is necessary to help create a fruity syrup for the relish. If the mixture is too dry, add a little orange juice.

*Cranberries, walnuts, and whole oranges are incredibly rich in phytonutrients and particularly powerful antioxidants. Eating these foods raw and freshly chopped means you are flooding your body with concentrated nutrition. Again, please use organic cranberries and oranges, now widely available in local grocery stores.*

***Cranberries** are American fruits whose powerful flavonoids (tannins and proanthocyanidins) give them proven antibacterial properties especially for urinary tract and periodontal infections, and ulcers, as well. They are also particularly good sources of vitamin C and potassium.*

***Oranges** are high in folate and vitamin C. The white pith and orange peel contain special phytochemicals called monoterpenes that help prevent and fight cancer by inhibiting the conversion of certain substances (tobacco, nitrites, or pesticides, for example) into carcinogens.*

***Walnuts** are high in proteins, B vitamins, and minerals magnesium and potassium. They are valuable sources of healthy unsaturated fatty acids, and several important amino acids involved in regulating nerve function and more. One of these is arginine, a substance that helps improve the elasticity of arterial vessels by boosting vital nitric oxide. This in turn can improve cardiovascular and liver health, as well as sexual function, immune function, and skin and joint health.*

## Maple Autumn Mélange

1 small butternut squash (or pumpkin)  
1 small acorn squash  
1 large turnip (or 2-3 parsnips)  
4 TBS butter melted with 4 TBS maple syrup

This recipe makes about 4 servings, but could be easily doubled or tripled.

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Peel and chop the vegetables into 1 inch cubes. Pile them into a low sided baking pan or dish (to maximize browning). Pour the melted butter/syrup over the vegetables and toss to coat them all. Spread them out and bake for 20-30 minutes till tender and barely browned.

Preparation tips: Winter squash can have really hard rinds. To peel and cut safely, start by washing and drying them well. Use a broad bladed non-serrated sharp knife. For butternuts, cut in half where the thin and thick parts meet, then placing flat ends on the board, peel by cutting down the sides. Cut off the rounded tops and bottoms. Halve and scrape out seeds (a grapefruit spoon works great!) Then you can cut the large pieces into the desired chunk size.

For acorns or pumpkin, start by cutting down the middle from top to bottom. Scoop out the seeds and cut into wedges, (always work with the flat cut sides down) then into the desired chunks. Now, cut the peel off of each piece. I know it sounds tedious, but it actually goes fast and is safer than trying to peel larger wobbly pieces. Of course, practice helps!

*Winter squash are nutrient packed vegetables high in beta carotene (vitamin A) and C, as well as magnesium, potassium and calcium. They also have the benefits of high levels of fiber which aid in digestive health and help keep you feeling full longer. See the October issue for more orange winter squash recipes and information.*

## Heart Disease Part III: Lifestyle Risk Factors

In September, I talked about the primary causes of heart disease, which are inflammation and oxidation. Last month, I discussed the role of nutrition (food and/or supplements) in keeping the entire cardiovascular system healthy. You may recall, or go back and see, that there are many components to both cause and nutrition. This third part, lifestyle factors, is relatively simple. There are only a few factors to take into account, *but* the impact of each of these is extensive. Just as the entire body is directly affected by nutrition, lifestyle choices represent the difference between healthy life and premature death.

Exposure to environmental toxins is one lifestyle factor that is not always under our control, since we may live in an area with specific contaminant issues. Most lifestyle factors, though, are based on choices we make each and every day. You can decide to make healthier choices or live with the consequences of poor ones.

The primary lifestyle factors related to heart disease are: smoking, stress, poor diet, lack of exercise, excess weight, and alcohol use. Every one of these factors leads to inflammation and oxidation. They also place additional stress on the body as it tries to compensate for the damage and harm it is experiencing. Heart disease is rarely an isolated health issue. The body is an interconnected system.

**Smoking** is the single largest cause of heart disease, causing an estimated 20-25% of all deaths associated with heart disease. It decreases the amount of oxygen available to the heart and other tissues, increases blood pressure and heart rate, decreases good HDL cholesterol, causes damage to blood vessel linings, and increases the tendency of blood to clot. These effects, in turn, result in sharp increases in heart attacks and other cardiovascular diseases. Studies show smoking to be the primary risk factor for strokes, aneurysms, atherosclerosis, peripheral artery disease, sudden cardiac death, and cardiomyopathy. Neither smoking less nor using low tar/low nicotine cigarettes lowers the risk. Second hand smoke can be as harmful. Even Sudden Infant Death has now been linked to maternal smoking and/or second hand exposure.

**Stress** is a major factor that varies for most of us from day to day. We have little control over many stressors, such as traffic, crime rates, or the present economic situation. How we respond to stress, however, is more important than the stressor itself. Having happy & supportive marriages and/or close personal relationships with family and friends makes a tremendous difference in our ability to cope with stress. Complementary modalities such as meditation, aromatherapy, massage, acupuncture, yoga, and so forth, are effective ways of dealing with stress as is any type of physical exercise.

**Poor Diet** is one of the easiest factors for us to control. The Standard American Diet (SAD) is a leading cause of heart disease. Please refer to my Sept. and Oct. newsletters for more information on heart nutrition.

**Lack of Exercise** increases risk. Regular physical activity strengthens your heart as it increases blood flow. Activity improves vascular health, blood pressure, lipid profiles, stress management and more. A total of 30-60 minutes of moderate exercise each day can decrease your risk of fatal heart disease by at least 25%. Walking, gardening, and climbing stairs are easy ways to increase activity. Regular, more strenuous activity is better. Orchestra directors are well known for longevity despite poor health habits. The key appears to be the raised arms in continual vigorous movement. Consider "directing" music of your liking on rainy days!

**Excess Weight** has become the single most serious health problem in the US. One of every three American adults is now obese, and what's worse, many of them do not realize it, thinking they are only moderately overweight. The Framingham Heart Study found the risk of heart failure increases by a staggering 104% in the obese. Weight loss is not easy, but even a 10% decrease in weight can make a difference in reducing your risk of fatal heart disease.

**Alcohol Use** is directly related to increased heart disease risk. Congestive heart failure can be caused or made much worse by the use of any alcohol. Individuals with high blood pressure or who take prescription medications for heart disease should also avoid alcohol. (Caution: Alcohol interacts negatively with virtually all types of medication whether they are prescription or over the counter medications.) Numerous studies have shown that the equivalent of one (for women) or two (for men) glasses of wine or beer may be beneficial for healthy adults, but anything over that, and the harmful effects begin.

So now you know what you need to do. Don't hesitate to seek help in making any necessary changes; your life really does depend on it!

"Yum! All those wonderful aromas in the house. Lets see, is that turkey, ham, pumpkin pie and all those tasty casseroles? I'll just take my place over by the table, 'cause somebody will give me treats. My people always give in to my wagging tail, big soulful eyes, little whines. Yep, today will be a feast for me!"

Sound like your dog? OK, swallow a curtain rod and get a backbone! Better yet-get educated! We owe it to our "4 legged kids" to provide a safe, healthy environment for them. With the holidays upon us, we need to keep a special watch out for household hazards. From now until January 09, life will be lived at warp speed.

When cleaning, make sure you return all cleaning products to a secure spot. Wow, what a great time to switch to safe, green cleaners. When those tension headaches/backaches happen-please don't leave your medicine out. What about all those wonderful plants used for decorations-and the ever present tree? If you're unsure about toxicity of a plant-check with your local garden center. Don't forget about wrapping paper, bows and ribbons. Even older dogs will chew and ingest bow and ribbons when over-stimulated . Not a good thing! Nothing like 3 feet of ribbon to upset the normal flow!

Now, lets look at foods that can almost ensure an emergency trip to the vet. Chocolate abounds this time of year and dogs can sniff it out-even on the counter! Chocolate contains methylxanthines which can cause abnormal heart rhythm, seizures, tremors and even death. Darker chocolate seems to have higher potential for poisoning. Add to the NO-NO List-onions, grapes, raisins, rich fatty foods. The pancreas just can't cope with the overload: the result is pancreatitis. Lookout for depression, vomiting, fever, lethargy, and diarrhea.

What's a person to do? You want to include your furry kids in the festivities, but how can it be accomplished? Maybe now is good time to take a more healthy approach to cooking and eating! Lean turkey and chicken are fine in small amounts. Veggies are always a good thing, provided they're not covered in a cream sauce! Set aside some of the green beans, potato's, etc. before all those spices and sauces are added.

How about dessert? Of course! The internet abounds with dog cake/treat recipes and there are several wonderful cookbooks for dogs as well. Molasses, honey, brown rice syrup, and malted barley in small amounts are great sweeteners instead of sugar. (Guess what-they're better for you as well!) Be sure to put food away-even little dogs can become "counter surfers."

Last, please make sure your pet wears a collar with an identification tag. With company coming and going, family in and out, and trips to carry packages in from the car, dogs can often slip out the door undetected. If your pet isn't normally outside without a lead-well, it can be a disaster. Sometimes a quiet room or a crate is the safest place for Rover. Sure beats looking for a lost pet on Christmas Eve!

Eat well, bark less, wag more, cuddle often!

**Nancy has been in the pet care industry since 1980. She is member of the National Dog Groomers Association of America, and International Society of Canine Cosmetologists; speaker and author. She owns the holistic grooming salon, Classy Clawz and Pawz, in Kingsport. You can contact her at 423-239-2529**

#4 Who established Thanksgiving Day as the 4thThursday in November, and when?

#5 Who led the first known thanksgiving prayer celebration of the new world?

#6 Where and in what year was the first settler/Indian harvest feast celebrated?

Answers on pg. 12

Did you know...? Some native North and South American tribes observe Thanksgiving and Columbus Days as days of mourning, because these represent the beginning of the end of their societies and cultures.

## Check It Out

I know that by the time you read this, you may already be involved in a number of fall activities. If you're like me, you still have a number of end of season gardening chores to get to, maybe some fall planting to do (I just got my garlic in for next year), and a few things that need to be done to prepare your house and garden for winter.

Then there is the beginning of what I will call the holiday machine. Since this issue has been dedicated in many ways to that topic, my choices for this issue's selections are relevant.

The *Paradox of Choice* is amusing as it is insightful. I thoroughly enjoyed pointing out to my daughter the patterns that make one of us a "maximizer" and the other of us a "satisficer". I will just tell you that one of us is always seeking the best, perfect choice, while the other is alright with a choice that satisfies a given set of criteria. The revelations of how abundance in choices makes our lives more stressful and more complicated are fascinating.

*Unplug the Christmas Machine* is also entertaining as it hits you with some real truths about the hows and whys of our Christmas celebration behaviors. There are several additional books and workshops related to the original. For a good taste of what this book is about, please read the special length guest article on page 9-11 of this issue.

I highly recommend taking a look at one or both of these books before the fever of the holiday season begins taking a toll on your sanity!

### The Paradox of Choice Why More is Less

How the Culture of Abundance  
Robs Us of Satisfaction

By Barry Schwartz

An interesting look at how the tremendous number of choices we have today, actually complicates and impacts our lives in ways we rarely realize.

### Unplug the Christmas Machine How to Have the Christmas You've Always Wanted

By Jo Robinson

The original book that spawned a modern movement aimed at reducing the growing "keep up with the Jones" mentality of the holiday.

The Macy's parade began in 1924, as the store's first-generation immigrants demonstrated their pride and thanks to America with a European-style festival.

Thanksgiving football has been a part of the holiday tradition in the USA since the 1920's, with professional teams in the spotlight since 1931.



*Several weeks ago, I was privileged to hear Gail's thought-provoking presentation. The Christmas Machine is already in full start up mode, and most of us are experiencing particularly high anxiety and stress this year as our country goes through some serious upheavals. I hope this special section gives you the tools and support you need to create a special, stressless, and meaningful holiday season for your family this year and for many years to come. Marie*

“Unplug the Christmas Machine” is a workshop designed by Jo Robinson and Jean Coppock Staeheli. They define the “Christmas machine” as the commercialization of Christmas which has turned the American family celebration into an elaborate, expensive production which takes more time, energy, and money than any other annual event. Advertising in every media tells us that women must stage a grand production Christmas to ensure their families’ happiness. Men often feel left out of the celebration with no meaningful part to play except for bill paying. Children, who are the primary target of all this activity, often spend their holidays obsessed with brand name toys, while their parents are too busy with Christmas to spend much time with them.

The commercial messages seem to promise us that if we just buy one more thing, just spend a little more money, then our families will be happy, our children will be grateful, our spouses will be appreciative and loving, we will have fun, we will be safe, we will be truly loved. Because we want all these things, we strive again each year for the perfect Christmas; the one that advertising tells us is possible. Often we are disappointed because the perfect Christmas we’ve strived so hard to achieve just doesn't seem to happen.

The key to “unplugging” the Christmas machine is to know what we really want from the holidays. Instead of trying to duplicate the “perfect Christmas” image that we see in the stores, on television, in magazines and newspaper ads, we need to decide what Christmas means to us. We need to create a Christmas that fits in with our values, that fits the unique needs of our families, and that gives us joy and satisfaction.

The following four workshop exercises are designed to help you separate fantasy from reality, to help you decide what is most important to you about Christmas, and to help you create a joyous, meaningful holiday celebration. Step One will get you thinking about the parts of your celebration that you enjoy and the parts that hold little or no meaning. In Step Two, you will rank your values to determine priority. Step Three opens your mind to the best holiday you can imagine, and finally in Step Four, you will use all this information to create a plan for your own personal celebration.

**Step One—Analyzing Your Holiday**

- Are you spending time on activities you enjoy? \_\_\_ Spending time on activities you do not enjoy?
- Do you ...
- Have enough time for preparations such as cleaning, buying gifts, planning parties?
- Have enough help with holiday chores?
- Enjoy Christmas activities at church? \_\_\_ Enjoy cultural holiday events?
- Enjoy holiday baking \_\_\_ craftmaking \_\_\_ decorating?
- Enjoy shopping for gifts? \_\_\_ Enjoy making gifts? \_\_\_ Have enough time to make gifts?
- Feel comfortable with the emphasis on gift giving? \_\_\_ Comfortable with the length of your gift list?
- Feel satisfied with your gift choices? \_\_\_ Enjoy giving to everyone on your list?
- Receive gifts with joy and happiness? \_\_\_ Would you enjoy a Christmas with no gift giving?
- Are you comfortable with the amount of money you spend on holiday: gifts \_\_\_ travel \_\_\_ charity \_\_\_ decorating \_\_\_  
food \_\_\_ clothing \_\_\_ entertaining \_\_\_
- Plan spending in advance? \_\_\_ Have family communication about holiday expenditures?
- Do you volunteer helping poor, lonely, or needy? \_\_\_ Make donations to favorite charities?
- Does the true meaning of Christmas come alive for you in the way that you celebrate?
- Do you set aside time for meaningful or spiritual activities?
- Enjoy attending parties and functions? \_\_\_ Enjoy hosting parties and receptions?
- Spend enough time with friends and/or coworkers?
- Get enough sleep & rest? \_\_\_ Exercise? \_\_\_ Eat and Drink healthfully during holidays? \_\_\_
- Do you get sick during the holidays?
- Do you ever feel sad? \_\_\_ Depressed? \_\_\_ or Lonely \_\_\_ during the holidays?
- Do you spend enough enjoyable time with your immediate family?
- Do you have family traditions that you enjoy each year? \_\_\_ Celebrate with your ethnic customs?
- Are there certain traditions from your childhood that you miss?
- Does your celebration bring your family closer together?
- Are you comfortable spending time with your relatives?
- Do you feel pulled between relatives during the holidays?
- Would you rather have your own family Christmas without spending time with your extended family?

## Unplugging the Christmas Machine, continued

### Step One, continued— If you have children at home

Do your children enjoy participating in Christmas shopping, decorating, baking?

Do your children have realistic expectations about gifts?

Do you participate in school holiday activities?

If you are a two parent family, are both parents active in children's holiday activities?

Do you and/or your children suffer from "post Christmas let down"?

### Step Two—Finding the True Meaning of Christmas for You

You may now realize that you are trying to celebrate someone else's Christmas— influenced by commercial pressures, habit, or other people's priorities to emphasize things that you don't enjoy. It is time to evaluate your own beliefs and begin a new celebration that is in harmony with your values. Rank the following statements in order from 1 to 12 in order of importance. There is no correct or "perfect" order. Statements that have no value for you can be crossed out and replaced with a value/activity of your own.

Christmas is a time to ...

spend enjoyable time with my immediate family

be reunited with my relatives

show my love and generosity through gifts

remember the poor and needy, help others

celebrate the birth of Christ

relax and be renewed

get together with friends to celebrate

enjoy cultural activities

create a beautiful, festive home

be active in my church community

make, bake and enjoy holiday treats and crafts

be a peacemaker, at home and in the world

### Step Three—Envisioning Your Holiday Fantasy

Now, wipe the slate clean and design your own perfect holiday, disregarding all traditions, obligations, and responsibilities. Let your imagination run wild! Picture your ideal holiday. The only requirement is that this fantasy must be deeply satisfying to you. Write down your fantasy with as many details as possible. It can be for the whole season or just Christmas Day. Imagine the setting, the activities, the people with you, the food, the music, the decorations, and the general mood. Magical things can happen—you can be anywhere!

### Step Four—Creating a Holiday Plan

Now that you have looked at your current celebration, clarified your feelings, and imagined the perfect fantasy celebration, you need to take this information and decide on at least two realistic goals for this year that will make your Christmas more meaningful and fun for you and your family. On a separate piece of paper, write down your answers to these statements. Each goal need at least three specific statements about the ways the goals can be achieved. These statements should tell what is going to be done, who is going to do it, and when it will be done. They should be stated in positive terms and should be realistic. For example, if your goal is to spend more time with your children, you may state that you will read a Christmas story to them every night starting on Dec. 18, on the Sat. before Christmas, you will spend the day baking and decorating cookies with them, and that you are going to decline any invitations after a certain date that do not include your children.

Your holiday plan needs to be shared with your family. Many people other than yourself may be involved. This is an emotional, traditional time of year, so remember that change must occur slowly. Even a very good plan will not create a "perfect" Christmas. Perfection in any life experience is rare, especially in one as complex as Christmas. Think of this year as the beginning of a five year plan. Sometimes, just changing your attitude and becoming more relaxed and accepting of the holidays can be as beneficial as actually changing the way you celebrate.

My first goal for Christmas 2008 is \_\_\_\_\_

Ways for me to accomplish this goal are: (name three)

My second goal for Christmas 2008 is \_\_\_\_\_

Ways for me to accomplish this goal are: (name three)

Unplugging... Continued, with material provided by Gail Campbell, comments and editing by Marie Browning

*Finally, some practical ideas for "unplugging", taken from an article entitled "Opening the Door to a Simpler, Healthier, Happier Holiday Season" by Wendy Priesnitz, and published in Natural Life Magazine of November-December 2003.*

"Lost touch with the excitement you felt as a child at the approach of the holiday season? Dreading the relentless round of advertising, Santa Claus images and worn out Christmas songs? Wondering how such a magical idea got so off track? Feeling like you want to do something different this year? ...think through every tradition associated with the holiday to find ways your family can make it simpler, healthier and less commercial."

*Restrict television time so that your family reduces the number of holiday commercials that urge you to spend time and money shopping. Realize that gift giving does the most environmental and economic harm as the hidden costs of gifts, packaging, and wrapping involve production/waste and transportation up front, and additional trash afterward.*

"Recover the almost lost art of self-giving through gifts of time and skill, as well as hand-made presents. A gift that you have made yourself is usually treasured far above a store-bought one, even if it is a bit rough around the edges. If you can't sew, paint or cook (or don't enjoy these activities), give a gift of your time or another skill that you possess ... baby-sitting for a new mom, ... a monthly letter writing session for an arthritic elder, and so on.

If you must buy gifts, fair trade products are now readily available by mail order and in gift shops in most North American cities. Many churches hold fair trade sales or alternative Christmas fairs. If you want to spend money on gifts for your friends and family, give an equal amount to charity. Then write on the card something like: 'This gift has been doubled by an equal gift given in your name to....' Some people forego gift giving altogether, and replace it completely with charitable donations. ... Or consider donating to an agency specializing in providing relief in war-torn areas."

*I consider gift wrapping to be one of the most costly and wasteful parts of the holiday season, but it doesn't have to be. I haven't bought paper in years, as we carefully collect and reuse paper, ribbon, and gift bags year after year. There is quite a bit of fun in it as recipients reminisce about favorites or past gifts wrapped in the this or that. We also use squares of fabrics (cut with pinking shears) and cloth ribbon that are especially reusable, or use things like tote bags as part wrapping and part gift. Making fabric gift bags takes 5 minutes of cutting and machine sewing, and beautiful scraps and "ends" can be found at fabric stores for nearly nothing. Hint: visit right after the holidays for the following year's makings.*

"There's no need to spend money on decorations for your home. Objects that you find on walks, such as beautiful leaves, evergreen boughs, pinecones, nuts and branches with berries, can add a touch of holiday charm to your home. Of course, they won't stay fresh for long, but who needs to extend the season artificially anyway? In many areas, mistletoe and holly are available..." *(and magnolia, too. Sometimes real tree vendors will let you take scraps, as well)*

"And then there is the Christmas tree. If the mass-produced artificial ones don't convey the holiday spirit for your family, consider a live tree. They are a great alternative to the ones that are chopped down from plantations, then discarded. In many areas, an evergreen can be potted in the fall, brought inside for a few weeks over the holidays, then kept in a sheltered spot until it can be planted in the ground. Consult your local nursery for the best varieties." *We collect discarded real trees after the holidays to protect tender shrubs from deer and frost damage and simultaneously provide cover for birds and small animals. After enjoying the pine scents for months, I drag the trees into our wooded areas in the spring, where they continue to be beneficial to animals and earth.*

So many holiday activities involve either spending money, partying with people you wouldn't otherwise choose to be with, or drinking and eating too much. As an alternative or at least as an antidote, spend time in nature, preferably with your family. Nature reminds us of our place in the world, fills us with a wonder appropriate to the season and helps restore our souls--and it's free. So take a family walk....If it's too cold to be outside, spend family time indoors, reading or playing board games." *How about watching family friendly holiday movies together? We have found these especially fun and relaxing after a day of family togetherness overload!*

"Another family activity that will help everyone get into the spirit of the season is a service project, such as working together at a soup kitchen or sorting donations at a food bank." *Church activities offer meaningful options, as well.*

"The winter solstice provides an alternative focus for holiday celebrations. Traditionally a celebration of the cycle of nature and a reaffirmation of the continuation of life, the solstice marks the return of the sun after the longest night in the year. This year, the winter solstice falls *around midnight between Dec. 21-22*. Candles, fireplaces, meditations or prayers and the sharing of good food seem to be the focus for many winter solstice celebrations."

"As the Grinch found, celebrating the season in style doesn't take tinsel and trappings. Lights, a little food, some music and some people to do it all with, and you have a simple, healthy, environmentally sound Christmas celebration."

*Resources to "unplug" Christmas can be found on my website Resources page.*

Gail Campbell has been a reference librarian at Johnson City Public Library for over 30 years. Her Library degree is from the University of TN, and she has been doing "Unplug" programs since about 1985. She and her husband live in Kingsport, and her two children are now grown and married. You can contact her at the Library, or at 423-434-4352.

## The Last Word

Cold weather has finally forced us to realize that fall is really here, though I am amazed to still be picking a few strawberries each day from my handful of plants. Apparently, they aren't ready to give in, and that's fine with me. I haven't seen any hummingbirds for over a week now, so I guess they have moved on to warmer winter homes. Robins, however, seem to be staying around all winter, now.

Since we have disrupted natural habitats with our urban sprawl, many of our birds and other wildlife depend on our help to see them through the winter. Bird seed and suet cakes help, and cover, in the form of evergreens, thick grassy areas, or bird houses and gourds provide safety and warmth. Fresh water will be greatly appreciated by birds, squirrels and other small animals as well.

Also, be a responsible pet owner. Don't forget to winterize the outside living quarters of any outside pets and animals. Make sure that leads, fences, or chains don't deny them protection from freezing rain and cold wind, as well as fresh, unfrozen food and water. If your pets are walking on salt/chemical treated streets, remember that this can damage their paws. Check with your vet or groomer for tips on how to clean and treat them.

I hope you have enjoyed this special issue of Healthier Solutions as much as I enjoyed putting it together for you. Let me know what you thought about some of the articles. I always look forward to your feedback. It is my sincere hope that you found several types of information that you can put to immediate use in improving your health and well being, and that of your family's.

I want to let you know that I will be combining the next two issues, December and January, into a single issue. This will allow me to take some of my own advice, and make my family a priority for a few weeks. I know you will understand. While I had made this decision several weeks ago, the "Unplug the Christmas Machine" presentation really impressed upon me how valid and important it was to stick to it

I'll close with this "official" definition for our richly anticipated holiday:

According to Wikipedia, Thanksgiving is: *"an annual one-day holiday to express gratitude for the things one has at the end of the harvest season...can be traced to harvest festivals that have been celebrated ... since ancient times, the ...holiday has religious undertones related to the deliverance of the ...settlers after the brutal winter.... Most people celebrate by gathering at home with family or friends for a holiday feast. A tradition also exists to share the ... harvest with those who are less fortunate."*

I wish you all a wonderful Thanksgiving and safe travel. May you be surrounded by the best of family, friends, and food, and most of all, may you have many blessings to be thankful for!

Live, Laugh, Love, and Be Well!

Marie

### December/January Super Issue

Out with the Old, In with the New!

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Gardasil: the scariest vaccine

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Answers to trivia questions:

#1: USA, Canada, Switzerland, Argentina, Brazil, Japan, Korea, and Liberia all have official Thanksgiving holidays.

#2: Abraham Lincoln in 1863.

#3: George Washington in 1789.

#4: Franklin Roosevelt in 1941

#5: Spanish Explorer Coronado in 1541

#6: St. Augustine, Fla. In 1565