Christmas health-busters

As the festive season beckons, it's easy to lose sight of the health goals that you've been trying to achieve all year. Rich food, plentiful alcohol and lack of exercise all contribute to a sluggish system, not to mention the family hazards that might fly your way. Try following these tips to minimize the damage to your body and soul.

**Stay off the snacks**
Around Christmas time, many of the pounds packed on are due to snacks that lie around the house. Go easy on the chocolates and nuts, they are full of fat and are unnecessary when you are also enjoying large meals! As a substitute, have bowls of fruit available (grapes and berries are good) and help fill kids' stockings with an orange or apple, too.

**Plan a walk**
Just because it's Christmas doesn't mean normal life has to stop completely! Build some time into your day to take some exercise, even if it's a simple walk at the mall or in the neighborhood. Taking time out is also helpful for avoiding family tension: if there's a storm brewing, calm yourself down by getting out and about for 30 minutes or so.

**Bulk up on fiber**
Whatever your chosen Christmas meal, max out on veggies and cut back on the meat. It doesn't have to be dull — look up inventive ways to make a splendid salad or dress up those sprouts. As long as your veggies aren't covered in butter or rich salad dressing, you...
can stuff down a lot without packing on too many pounds.

**Be sensitive to others**
Not everybody finds Christmas a pleasant time — be sensitive to the feelings of those around you, especially if there's been a recent bereavement or loss. Even happy events such as the birth of a child can cause emotional havoc, so stay aware and steer clear of potentially hazardous topics.

**Don’t start on the booze too early**
Tempting though it can be to crack open the bubbly as soon as you’re dressed, save it for later in the day. When eventually you do have a drink, remember to space alcoholic beverages with soft ones, allowing your liver a chance to fight back. Don’t forget that it’s harder for your liver to metabolize alcohol when your sugar intake has been high: it prioritizes the absorption of sugar over alcohol, so if you’ve been on the chocolates all day, any alcohol will remain in your system a little longer.

**Get organized!**
If you leave all your preparations to the last minute, things can get stressful. Financially, too, leaving everything until last can create a big hole in your wallet. Space everything out by writing lists and buying presents ahead of time (this will also save you cash). Buy foods that won’t go off in advance, too, such as Christmas puddings and so on.

**Choose your drinks carefully**
If you’re watching your weight, some drinks will kill your diet. Obvious ones to look out for are creamy cocktails, but keep an eye on your intake of premixed drinks and cocktails in general. Stick to lower alcohol drinks like wine.

**Set out expectations**
Christmas can be a very happy time, but it can also be stressful. If your parents are separated or if you’re planning to spend the holidays with your partner’s family, make sure the other set know in good time. Disappointment often breeds resentment and the last thing you need on your hands at Christmas is a family feud. As at any other time of the year, communication is of paramount importance — hiding away from telling somebody something they won’t want to hear will only prolong the issue.
Diabetes and High Blood Pressure are called the Silent Killers.
Do you have High Blood Pressure or High Blood Sugar? Find out by making an appointment to be tested FREE.
Call Jackie Hill APRN 595-3807
A Tribute and a Plea:
Anthony Ray Was a Beacon of Light Snuffed Out Too Quickly
By: Ira Combs, RN

Every now and then as professionals, we get the opportunity to have our work and commitment rewarded in unexpected ways. Sure, we do our jobs and we are happy to be able to make a contribution to someone else’s well-being. But every so often a person comes along whose very presence lights up the world and as such, you feel a special connection and hope that this person will be someone who will have that same impact in the years ahead.

If you have been watching the local news you are probably aware of the rash of shootings that have occurred in the North Omaha community. It has gotten to the point where it seems commonplace, but when the commonplace impacts upon those who might have been the next Barack Obama or the next Maxine Waters, you have to sit back and take a deep breath. As I take that breath, I would like to exhale long enough to share with you some information regarding one of those shootings.

Anthony Ray was a participant of the 2008 Youth Expression of Health, a program for young people in North Omaha who were interested in research in general, and the medical field, specifically. Anthony was a bright, quiet, and reserved young man.

Anthony was killed by a 12-year-old two weeks ago, by a gun shot to the head.

A handsome smile and urge for excitement was a great way to describe this young man, aged 15, who enjoyed playing video games and football with his friends. Recently at the University of Nebraska Medical Center Youth Expression of Health workshop for youth interested in health careers and research, Anthony wrote in his journal: “I want to be doctor or counselor, I want to make people feel better, I know how it is not to feel good.” Anthony was a very spiritual young man and enjoyed attending church every week. He enjoyed going to movies. He was a creatively imaginative young man who had a passion and talent for writing. He longed to be adopted and have a place to call “home.”

In a case of bitter irony, his foster family was going to surprise him, this Christmas, with the news that they were going to make his place with them permanent. Now, this young man who surely worked hard enough to deserve the best, will never get that news. I suppose the question is, “What can we do to stop the senseless taking of life?” This is doubly tragic because Anthony’s life was taken by -- a 12-year-old; yet another case of a child killing a child.

In Anthony’s memory, I just wanted to share these pictures of the young man with you so that we don’t soon forget what he looked like, what he stood for and what he may very well have been in terms of positive impact on this or some other community. Maybe these brief words and the photos that follow will serve as an incentive for some in our community to THINK TWICE before handling a gun. At the same time, maybe this tribute will prompt some of us adults to see the value of spending more time with the young people in our community in order to help, direct and mentor them.
PHAT (Physically Healthy And Toned) and Fabulous

Is a research program of the University of Nebraska Medical Center. It is a culturally relevant, physical activity and nutrition program developed to assist adult women in making healthy lifestyle choices. It is hoped the end result will be improved health and better quality of life.

For More Information Contact:
Tamicka Bradley 402-559-5327
University Nebraska Medical Center
984040 Nebraska Medical Center Annex 12
Omaha, NE 68198-4040
Holiday Gifts that Promote Health

Tired of giving chocolates, cookies, and other sweet treats for Christmas? Chances are, the people on your list are tired of receiving them too. With Canadians becoming more health-conscious than ever, healthy Christmas gifts are topping their wish lists. This year, give your loved ones a gift that will promote improved health for many Christmas seasons to come with the following gift ideas:

- A brightly-colored fruit basket is a classic gift and a great way to inspire nutritious eating. Fresh pineapples, sweet grapefruits, and tangy oranges can be combined with less traditional choices like pomegranates and tangelos.
- Buy an annual membership to the local health club for that friend who keeps saying he's been meaning to join. Gift certificates for dance lessons, yoga classes, or running clinics are another great option to encourage friends and family to stay fit through the New Year.
- Give a salad bowl, along with all the ingredients for a great salad. Include accessories, such as a paring knife, citrus peeler, and a variety of vegetables. Don't forget to sneak in a recipe for your favorite homemade dressing.
- Send a month's supply of bottled water to keep loved ones well hydrated during the dry winter months.
- Give a vegetable steamer with a variety of healthy cooking items. Steaming is a great cooking option to minimize fat and keep nutrients intact. Fill it with dried herbs, garlic bulbs, and a variety of bottled spices.
- Order a subscription to a health magazine to offer regular inspiration and practical tips for healthy living.
- Build a fitness basket. Colorful socks and a visor can be paired with an energy bar, water bottle, and walking pedometer. If you feel like splurging, head to an outdoors store and pick up some great outdoor gear. Let your loved one pick a new sport he or she'd like to try and buy the equipment.
- Stuff a vegetable steamer with a variety of healthy cooking items. Steaming is a great cooking option to minimize fat and keep nutrients intact. Fill it with dried herbs, garlic bulbs, and a variety of bottled spices.
- Encourage kids to get active with the gift of a skipping rope, bike, hula hoop, or soccer ball. Or try a pogo stick or skateboard. Don't forget the helmet and other protective gear.

- Buy a yoga or pilates mat, along with an instructional DVD, for those who prefer to work out at home.
- Give a healthy cookbook. From heart-friendly cooking to cancer prevention recipes, cookbooks are always a popular choice. If you're creative, make your own by compiling favorite family recipes in a decorative binder. Pair it with a set of funky measuring cups or a cookbook stand.
- Build a fitness basket. Colorful socks and a visor can be paired with an energy bar, water bottle, and walking pedometer. If you feel like splurging, head to an outdoors store and pick up some great outdoor gear. Let your loved one pick a new sport he or she'd like to try and buy the equipment.
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Five Steps to Safer Health Care

1. Ask questions if you have doubts or concerns.
   Ask questions and make sure you understand the answers. Choose a doctor you feel comfortable talking to. Take a relative or friend with you to help you ask questions and understand the answers.

2. Keep and bring a list of ALL the medicines you take.
   Give your doctor and pharmacist a list of all the medicines that you take, including non-prescription medicines. Tell them about any drug allergies you have. Ask about side effects and what to avoid while taking the medicine. Read the label when you get your medicine, including all warnings. Make sure your medicine is what the doctor ordered and know how to use it. Ask the pharmacist about your medicine if it looks different than you expected.

3. Get the results of any test or procedure.
   Ask when and how you will get the results of tests or procedures. Don’t assume the results are fine if you do not get them when expected, be it in person, by phone, or by mail. Call your doctor and ask for your results. Ask what the results mean for your care.

4. Talk to your doctor about which hospital is best for your health needs.
   Ask your doctor about which hospital has the best care and results for your condition if you have more than one hospital to choose from. Be sure you understand the instructions you get about follow-up care when you leave the hospital.

5. Make sure you understand what will happen if you need surgery.
   Make sure you, your doctor, and your surgeon all agree on exactly what will be done during the operation. Ask your doctor, “Who will manage my care when I am in the hospital?” Ask your surgeon: Exactly what will you be doing? About how long will it take? What will happen after the surgery? How can I expect to feel during recovery? Tell the surgeon, anesthesiologist, and nurses about any allergies, bad reaction to anesthesia, and any medications you are taking.
### Santa Clause Health Report

Every year, as Christmas approaches, Santa Claus visits his local health center for a check-up. We have had exclusive sight of his doctor’s report. It raises serious questions about whether this year’s toy deliveries can be guaranteed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Mr. Santa Claus, aka Father Christmas, St Nicholas, St Nick</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
<td>approx 1,720 (born c. 280 AD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality:</td>
<td>Originally from Asia Minor, now lives at North Pole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status:</td>
<td>Married, and lives with numerous elves and several animal companions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation:</td>
<td>An early Christian bishop turned toy-deliverer. Also the patron saint of children and seafarers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comment:**

Mr. Claus is in remarkably good shape for a man of his age. (He already exceeds the life expectancy of the average male by 1,651 years.) However, his large waist circumference and higher than recommended body mass make him vulnerable to heart disease and diabetes.

**Recommendation:**

He should eat fewer slices of pie and cookies and consume at least seven portions of fresh fruit and vegetables a day. It’s advised that he have at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise 5-6 times a week. Exercise is also a good relief for stress which I’m sure he has a lot of in December.

**Comment:**

Mr. Claus informs me that he prefers his sleigh to cruise at 7,000 feet to avoid bad weather and I am therefore concerned about his vulnerability to altitude sickness. I am also worried that, when he enters US airspace, he might be mistakenly identified on radar as an intruder and shot down.

**Recommendation:**

He should ensure his sleigh keeps below 2,000 feet at all times. If he does go higher, he will need to carry oxygen. Having consulted the FAA on his behalf, I have advised him to file a flight plan prior to departure and install an identifying transponder. In any event, so long as he shows no hostile intent, I am assured he will be escorted safely into the US by Strategic Air Command.

**Comment:**

The Local weather office informs me that the temperature in Nebraska on Christmas Eve can reach about 20 degrees Fahrenheit or lower. The patient is clearly at considerable risk of hypothermia and frostbite.

**Recommendation:**

Warm clothing is essential. The Boy Scouts tells me he should wear: three layers of clothing, including an inner layer of thermal insulation and an all-in-one down suit; two pairs of gloves; two pairs of socks and thermal insulated boots; a tubular scarf; and a hat and hood.

**Comment:**

Mr. Claus's occupation carries considerable risks: exposure to soot in the chimneys through which he frequently descends can cause skin and lung cancers as well as ulcers on the corneal surface of the eye; climbing up and down roofs and chimneys presents obvious risks of falling; and back trouble could result from lifting a heavy sack of presents.

**Recommendation:**

Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) warns that work at a height exceeding twenty feet requires either scaffolding or firmly-secured ladders. I have therefore advised Mr. Claus to enter buildings only by the front door. (If he insists on using his traditional route, goggles, a face mask and hard hat will be essential.) Attendance at a training course on safe lifting techniques is also recommended.

**Comment:**

Mr. Claus is required to work in close proximity to large numbers of children in air-conditioned shopping malls. This increases the likelihood of colds and flu.

**Recommendation:**

Given the patient's age, a flu vaccination and pneumonia shot is advisable. He should also increase his immunity by regular moderate exercise (this will also help him lose weight) and taking a vitamin supplement.

**Comment:**

Mr. Claus is understandably reluctant to discuss his sexual health being an older mature adult. He also reports no urinary problems and, surprisingly for his age, may therefore be free of prostate trouble.

**Recommendation:**

I recommend a precautionary rectal examination and blood test for signs of prostate enlargement. In line with the clinic's policy to encourage safe sex, Mr. Claus should be offered written information. Being a role model Santa Claus may just be the person to spread the message of “safe sex”. A present that many of our teens need.
Research Projects in Our Community

**Smokers and non-smokers**

Needed for research study UNMC is conducting a research study comparing the lungs of 45 to 75 year olds who have never smoked to current smokers with various stages of lung disease. All study related tests and procedures are performed at no charge to participants:

- Complete medical history and physical exam;
- Complete lung function testing;
- EKG
- Bone density scan
- Numerous lab tests
- High-resolution CT scan of the chest
- Bronchoscopy
- Chest X-ray

There is a stipend for time and travel for this four-visit study. If interested, please call Tiffany at 559-8245.

**Stem Cell Study**

Participants age 60 plus needed for stem cell study

Subjects are sought for a research study evaluating the effect of physical activity on stem cells in the blood. Participants will visit the UNMC Clinical Research Center twice, where they will have small amount of blood drawn and complete questionnaires related to their health history and physical activity. Subjects will wear a pedometer and accelerometer (similar in size to a pager) on their waist for seven days to determine current activity level. If you are 60 years of age or older, you may be eligible to participate. For more information, call the study coordinator at (402) 559-1158 or ajbowen@unmc.edu.

**Problem Gambling Study**

Adults needed for problem gambling study

Are you preoccupied with gambling and need to gamble with increasing amounts of money? Are you unsuccessful in your efforts to cut back or stop your gambling? Have others criticized you for your gambling? If so, you may suffer from Pathological Gambling, a disorder that affects more than 2 million adults. The UNMC Department of Psychiatry is looking for research volunteers, 19 years-of-age and over to evaluate an investigational treatment for pathological gambling. Study evaluation and medication are provided at no cost to those that meet eligibility requirements. For information, call 552-6005 or e-mail unmcprc@unmc.edu.

**COPD clinical study**

In the past several months have you noticed that you have been less active because of breathing difficulties? If you are a daily smoker or used to smoke, and have shortness of breath affecting your daily activities, you may have COPD - Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. You may qualify for a research study for people ages 40 to 80 who may have COPD. In this clinical study, participants will receive study-related medical care and study-related medications. If you are bothered by cough and have shortness of breath, you may qualify for a research study. Call Molly at 402-559-8292 for more information.

**Depression study**

Depression study in the department of psychiatry

Individuals that are experiencing depression are being recruited to participate in a research study of an investigational medication for depression. Participants must be 19 to 65 years of age and in good general medical health. All study procedures and medications are provided. For additional information call 552-6005, e-mail unmcprc@unmc.edu, or visit our Web site at www.unmc.edu/prc.
About 5 million Americans need blood transfusions each year. Some may need blood during surgery. Others depend on it after an accident or because they have a disease that requires blood components. Though the demand for blood is high and half of all Americans are eligible to donate, only about 5 percent of those eligible to give blood do so.

If you’re in good health, you can probably donate. Find out if you’re eligible and what to expect if you decide to give.

Who can donate blood?
You can donate blood if you:

- Are in good health
- Are at least 17 years old
- Weigh at least 110 pounds
- Pass the physical and health history assessments

Blood donor centers carefully screen potential donors. The screening guidelines are necessary to ensure that blood donation is safe for you and that it’s safe for the person who receives your blood.

During the screening process, you fill out a confidential medical history that includes direct questions about behaviors known to carry a higher risk of blood-borne infections — infections that are transmitted through the blood. These behaviors include prostitution, male homosexual activity and intravenous drug use. A trained staff member asks you about your health history and conducts a physical examination, which includes checking your blood pressure, pulse and temperature. Most common medical conditions, such as high blood pressure, and common medications, such as blood pressure pills, won’t prevent you from becoming a blood donor. All of the information from this evaluation is kept strictly confidential.

A small sample of blood taken from a finger prick is used to check your hemoglobin level, the oxygen-carrying component of your blood. If your hemoglobin concentration is normal and you’ve met all the other screening requirements, you can donate blood.

Because of the threat of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD), anyone in the United States who spent three months or more in the United Kingdom from 1980 through 1996 or who has spent five years in Europe from 1980 to the present is also ruled out. VCJD is thought to be obtained by eating beef infected with mad cow disease.

What can you expect during the blood donation?
You lie or sit in a reclining chair with your arm extended on an arm rest. A blood pressure cuff or tourniquet is placed around your upper arm to fill your veins with more blood. This makes the veins easier to see and easier to insert the needle into, and also helps fill the blood bag more quickly. Then the skin on the inside of your elbow is cleaned. During blood donation, a staff member checks for a vein in your arm before inserting the needle.

A new, sterile needle is inserted into a vein in your arm. The needle is attached to a thin, plastic tube and a blood bag. Once the needle is in place, you tighten your fist several times to help the blood flow from the vein into the bag.

After you’ve provided a unit of blood, about 1 pint, extra tubes of blood are drawn for testing. When complete, the needle is removed, a small bandage is placed on the needle site, and white gauze is wrapped around your arm. The needle is in place about 10 to 20 minutes.

The collected unit of blood is processed into “components,” which means the blood is separated into parts, such as:

- Platelets. These cells help stop bleeding.
- Red blood cells. These cells carry oxygen.
- Plasma. This is the liquid part of your blood, which carries nutrients and helps stop bleeding.

Each of these can then be given to people who need different blood components. Your blood donation can help up to three people.

What types of tests are done on the blood?
After donation, your blood is tested to determine your blood type — classified as A, B, AB and O — and your Rh factor. The Rh factor refers to the presence or absence of a specific antigen, a substance capable of stimulating an immune response, in the blood. So you’re either Rh positive or Rh negative, meaning you carry the antigen or you don’t. This information is important to know because your blood type and Rh factor must be compatible with the blood type and Rh factor of the person receiving your blood.

Certain infectious diseases can pass from the donor to the person receiving the blood. To prevent this, each unit of blood is tested for diseases such as West Nile virus, syphilis, hepatitis and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the virus that causes AIDS. If all tests are negative — showing no presence of these diseases — the blood is distributed for use in hospitals and clinics. If any test shows positive results,
the blood bank notifies you, and your blood is discarded and not used.

What can you expect after blood donation?

After donating you sit in an observation area, where you rest and eat a light snack. After 15 minutes, you can leave. Wait at least four hours before removing the bandage from your arm.

For 24 hours after your blood donation:

- Drink extra fluids
- Avoid lifting with the arm used during your donation
- Avoid strenuous exercise
- Avoid taking aspirin or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin)

You may experience an upset stomach or feel lightheaded or dizzy after donating blood. These symptoms usually go away after eating a meal and drinking fluids.

You might notice a bruise at the needle-stick site. You may also feel some pain, which usually lessens if you take an over-the-counter pain medication (acetaminophen). Contact the blood donor center or your doctor if you:

- Continue to feel nauseated, lightheaded or dizzy after resting, eating and drinking
- Notice a raised bump, continued bleeding or pain at the needle-stick site when you remove the bandage

- Feel pain or tingling down your arm, into your fingers
- Become ill with signs and symptoms of a cold or flu, such as fever, headache or sore throat, within four days after your blood donation. Bacterial infections can be transmitted by transfusion, and it’s important to let the blood donor center know if you become ill so that your blood won’t be used.

What are the risks?

Blood donation is safe. New, sterile disposable equipment is used for each donor, so there’s no risk of contracting a blood-borne infection by donating blood. Also, blood donor centers strictly enforce screening guidelines and eligibility requirements to make sure that donating will not harm the donor. If you’re a healthy adult, you can usually donate a pint of blood without it endangering your health. Within 24 hours of a blood donation, your body replaces the lost fluids. And after several weeks, your body replaces the lost red blood cells.

How often can you donate blood?

If you’re in good health and meet all of the donation criteria, you can donate blood every eight weeks.

Donate by calling the American Red Cross

(402) 341-2723

Seasons Greetings
From the Center for Reducing Health Disparities
UNMC College of Public Health
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Find out more at motac.org

Metro Omaha Tobacco Action Coalition

This project is supported in part by Region 6 Behavioral Healthcare through funding provided by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services/Tobacco-Free Nebraska program as a result of the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement.