

Healthy Living

A comprehensive guide to gifting fitness fans

Physical activity is an important component of a healthy lifestyle. Exercise guidelines supported by the medical community indicate most adults should get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week, or at least 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity each week.

Individuals can take several steps to be more active in their daily lives. Some become gym enthusiasts, while others congregate to yoga studios or other activities. Some still prefer to exercise at home or outdoors. When it comes time to shop for people with a fondness for fitness, gift givers can consider these ideas.

Upgrade a membership

Do some research to learn where your fitness lover spends most time working out. If it is a traditional gym, a kick-boxing studio or a H.I.I.T establishment, speak with the staff to see if you can upgrade the member's plan to receive more perks. For example, a base gym membership may only

include use of the floor machines and weights, but another may include all that as well as access to massage chairs, spa services and more.

Massager or massage package

Working out muscles can lead to soreness each time a new milestone is reached. Help soothe those tired muscles with the gift of a neck, back and shoulder massager. Or go a step further and purchase a few sessions at a massage therapy location near the recipient's home.

Insulated water bottle or tumbler

Staying hydrated is important when working out. An insulated water bottle ensures that fitness fans can enjoy cold water or a sports drink throughout their exercise sessions. There's even a water bottle that self-cleans using UV light to kill bacteria in the bottle.

Treadmill or stationary bike

If you know a loved one has had eyes on improving a home gym, a treadmill or stationary bike can bring

the space to the next level. There is home equipment for every budget.

New kicks

Comfortable, supportive athletic shoes ensure workouts aren't hindered by sore feet. Since shoe fit and style is a personal choice, it might be a safer bet to give a gift card

to a popular athletic store or online retailer rather than purchasing the footwear yourself.

Fitness monitor or smart watch

It seems like everyone now has some sort of smart device, but if the person on your list still hasn't made the switch to a watch

that tracks various health data, then that can make for a perfect gift. Smart watches and fitness trackers monitor steps and various health markers such as pulse, elevation climbed and distance, and can even detect if a user has a burgeoning health problem.

When pairing the watch with popular fitness apps, users can log daily activities and their diets to get a bigger picture of their overall health.

Those who prioritize fitness can benefit from any number of health- and fitness-minded gifts this season.

Healthy holiday recipe swaps

Although presents garner most of the fanfare during the holiday season, there is no denying that food and entertaining also figure prominently this time of year. Delish magazine reports that Christmas food consumption ranks third, behind Thanksgiving and Super Bowl Sunday, among Americans, and that a single Christmas meal can weigh in at 3,000 calories, not factoring in any other food consumed that day.

No one wants to feel held back while having fun with family and friends, but smart food choices can mean healthier living during this season of festivities. Dish up these alternatives when holiday entertaining.

- Lean on leaner cuts of meat. A strong body is built

on protein, and holiday hosts often make a meat or poultry dish the star of the holiday dinner table. When selecting holiday fare, choose leaner options such as "round" or "loin" roasts; otherwise, select white-fleshed fish and skinless poultry in lieu of other options.

- Use broths instead of creams. Soups and gravies are popular this time of year, and both can be made healthier by opting for stock or broth bases over more fattening milks or creams when creating these recipes.

- Create a one-crust pie. Pie is one of the more popular holiday desserts, and plenty of the calories come from a rich, buttery crust.

Lighten up by serving a one-crust pie, such as pumpkin or

sweet potato. Fruit-based pies like apple or blueberry also can be made with one crust. Simply top the fruit with a light crumb coating.

- Find ways to incorporate vegetables. Vegetables are low in calories and rich in vitamins and nutrients. Many also are high in fiber, so they can help people avoid overeating. According to dietary experts from the American Heart Association, people should aim for four to five servings of vegetables each day. When making a plate, fill half of the plate with vegetables. Enhance dishes like lasagna or other pastas with fresh vegetables as well.

- Skip the fried bird. Although deep-frying a turkey can reduce cooking time, frying historically is not the best cooking method for those who are making health-conscious choices. Rather than frying, consider spatchcocking (also known as butterflying) the turkey to enable it to cook faster. Use fresh

herbs and seasonings instead of butter and oil to flavor your turkey as well.

- Skip the cocktails. The Center for Science in the Public Interest says that classic cocktails with little to no added sugar typically fall into the 150- to 200-calorie range, while others can be about 200 to 300 calories each. Many people will want to save those extra calories for dessert or another indulgent dish rather than drinking them away. If you want to simulate a cocktail, make a spritzer with sparkling water and unsweetened cranberry juice.

Celebrants can make some smart choices in the foods and beverages they eat to enjoy a healthier holiday season this December.

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