



FEEL GOOD, DO GOOD: The Benefits of Giving Back

The holiday season is the perfect time to give back — and it turns out, doing so is just as good for you as it is for those you help. Giving not only brings joy to others but impacts our health and wellbeing in many positive ways. When we give, we release feel-good hormones that boost our mood, alleviate stress and may even help lessen physical aches and pains. Our generosity also improves our self-esteem, immune system, anxiety, blood pressure and sleep. Plus, helping others creates meaningful connections and brings a sense of belonging that can make the season feel even more magical!

SIMPLE WAYS TO GIVE BACK

- **Volunteer Locally:** Consider spending an hour or two at a food bank or animal shelter. A little time can mean a lot to others.
- **Share Small Acts of Kindness:** Brighten someone's day by buying a coffee for the person behind you, leaving a cheerful note or offering a helping hand. Small gestures of kindness can create ripple effects of kindness in our community!
- **Donate to a Cause:** If you're short on time, consider donating to a charity you care about.
- **Use Your Skills to Help Others:** Why not share your special talents? Whether it's tutoring, baking treats or mentoring someone, your unique skills can bring a lot of joy to others this holiday season.

- **Support Local Shops:** Give back to your community by supporting local businesses and talented craftspeople, especially those committed to sustainable practices or charitable initiatives.

Giving doesn't have to be grandiose to make an impact. Whether it's time, resources or skills, what you give can enrich your life and inspire others to do the same. Let this season be a celebration of the spirit of reciprocity and remember that each thoughtful gesture can create ripples of joy and kindness in our communities.

"Is Generosity Good for Your Health?", Kelli Harding, columbiadoctors.org, November 28, 2023.

"Ten Ways To Give Back During The Holiday Season", Hoskin, M. N., forbes.com, November 22, 2022.

Time-Saving Cooking Hacks for the Holidays

Try these holiday cooking tips to ease stress and free up time to reap the bountiful benefits of the season!

Prep. Measure, chop, dice and organize as many ingredients as possible ahead of time. To trim prep time, use a food processor when doable.

Clean as you cook. When you've got a dish in the oven, tidy up dirty cookware to save time for the next recipe on the menu. Do dishes the smart way — clean countertops first so you have a spot for bigger pots, etc.

Roast two (or more) small turkeys, rather than one large option for a big crowd. Turkeys weighing 18 pounds or more take much longer to thaw and cook and they tend to cook less evenly. A quick rule of thumb: Purchase enough turkey to serve one pound per person. Remember, you can rely on the side dishes to round out the meal. To budget time for thawing turkeys, **set a phone reminder for transferring the turkeys to the fridge**, right when you purchase the meat. For reference, a 16-pound turkey requires four days to thaw. **Avoid stuffing the turkey** because it extends the cooking time. Finally, **roast your turkeys the night before** to save time and ease stress.

Assemble speedy and healthy appetizers. For a festive twist on antipasto, assemble mini skewers with fresh mozzarella, cherry tomatoes, olives, and thin cucumber rounds. Serve them alongside whole-grain or gluten-free crackers and a light drizzle of balsamic vinegar. **Use fresh apple or pear slices as cracker substitutes** for a beautiful base

to pair with goat cheese, brie or a sprinkle of fresh Parmesan, topped with crushed pistachios and a pinch of rosemary. You might also **flavor air-popped popcorn with a sprinkle of cinnamon, smoked paprika, or Parmesan** for a healthy, savory twist. Finally, **create a holiday-inspired sweet treat** by coring and baking apples, then filling them with cranberry sauce mixed with a teaspoon of vanilla and chopped walnuts. Serve these warm for a perfect seasonal bite that's both sweet and nutritious.

Elevate any jar of marinara sauce. Mix in fresh, chopped carrots, peppers, spinach, zucchini or onions or add in fresh, minced garlic to make any jar of pasta sauce taste truly homemade quickly. Toss in fresh herbs right before serving.

Steam veggies and squash in the microwave. You can steam your veggies (and, most helpful, squash) in the microwave to expedite cooking time. Try adding the veggies to a microwave-safe bowl with a splash of water; cover with a lid; and heat for a few minutes. Squash like spaghetti squash generally takes 9 to 12 minutes. Do a quick Internet search for the recommended steam time for the veggie you're looking to cook!

We wish you and your loved ones a healthy holiday season filled with joy!

"99 Genius Tips That Will Make Your Holidays Better," tasteofhome.com, Sept. 25, 2024.

"31 Turkey Tips Everyone Should Know This Thanksgiving," tasteofhome.com, Oct. 5, 2024.

"25 Thanksgiving Cooking Tips Straight From Grandma," tasteofhome.com, Feb. 13, 2024.

"24 Last-Minute Ideas That Will Absolutely Save Your Holidays," tasteofhome.com, Jan. 31, 2024.

"12 Timeless Cooking Tips We Learned From Grandma," tasteofhome.com, Sept. 28, 2022.



PALEO-VEGAN PECAN TURTLES

Prep Time: 20 minutes, **Chill Time:** 2 hours
Serves: 17 single turtles

- 1/2 cup no-sugar-added sunflower butter
- 1/3 cup maple syrup
- 1/3 cup coconut oil, melted
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 68 pecan halves
- 1/2 cup dairy-free chocolate chips

1. Begin by preparing the caramel. In a medium bowl, combine the sunflower butter, maple syrup, coconut oil and vanilla. Mix it well until it's smooth and combined. Cover the mixture and place it in the fridge for at least two hours to harden.

2. While the caramel is hardening, prep the pecans. Place your parchment paper on a large baking sheet and arrange the pecan halves to form turtle legs. This will make the 17 turtles with four pecan halves each.

3. Once the caramel has set, scoop 1 tablespoon of the caramel mix out and roll it into a ball. Press the ball onto the middle of one set of the pecans and adjust it as needed. Place a small piece of pecan to make the head of the turtle. Repeat with the remaining caramel until all turtles are assembled.

4. In the microwave, melt the chocolate chips in a small bowl in 30-second increments until smooth, about 1 to 2 minutes. Scoop a small amount over each turtle and spread over the caramel.

5. Once complete, place the baking sheet in the fridge to allow the turtles to set.

6. These are best stored in the fridge, but they can be left at room temperature for a couple hours if being served at a party or packed to be taken to a gathering.

Nutrition Info:

Calories per serving: 164
Total fat: 14 g
Saturated fat: 5 g
Sodium: 1 mg

Total Carbohydrate: 10 g
Dietary fiber: 1 g
Sugar: 7 g
Protein: 2 g

Recipe adapted from: realfoodwithjessica.com

