



In Touch, In Tune

www.extension.purdue.edu/dearborn



December 2024

Dear Friends,

Time has brought us to December once again! I am thankful for the work that I do for Purdue Extension such as writing this monthly newsletter around the topics of human development, finances, health and wellness, and foods and nutrition, presenting program to individuals of all ages, and making a difference in the lives of those that I reach with my role as a Health and Human Sciences Educator. I have been struck by many individuals voicing thanks for the blessings in their lives.

This month, I encourage you to write a friend a letter, practice handwashing to fight the germs of the season, try a new recipe, start a new healthy habit, read to keep you mentally sharp, and relax to care for yourself. I hope you enjoy information related to the ideas that I encourage you to do during December.

I am blessed by having acquaintances with all of you. I wish you health, happiness, and blessings in 2025! Happy Holidays!

Warm Regards,
Marcia Parcell
Extension Educator, Health and Human Sciences

DATES TO REMEMBER

- December 24 & 25 Extension Office closed for Christmas
- December 31 & January 1 Extension Office closed for New Year

DECEMBER 7 IS LETTER WRITING DAY AND DECEMBER IS WRITE A FRIEND MONTH



HOW TO CELEBRATE WRITE TO A FRIEND MONTH IN DECEMBER

December is Write to a Friend Month – think about it, when was the last time you actually *wrote* to a friend rather than typed? Although technology makes it easier for us to connect with each other within seconds, many say they miss receiving letters and cards in the mail. Whether you're writing a letter or a Christmas card, use this month as a chance to give someone a surprise by sending them something that isn't read over via the screen on a computer or phone.

Write letters to those who need it—There are military members stationed all over the world who receive little to no mail and could use a little pick-me-up. Send letters thanking them for their service and let them know you appreciate what they're doing. Two sites you can do this through are Letters to Soldiers and Operation Gratitude. If possible, send a treat or two along with each of your letters.

Buy new stationery—Whether you're looking for casual or elegant stationery.

Take calligraphy classes—When you want to add a little flair to your writing, consider taking calligraphy classes.

Read "Chicken Soup" books—If you've never read "Chicken Soup for the Soul" books, you're missing out. They're wonderful collections of stories, poems, and letters written to, from and about others. Celebrate Write to a Friend Month by reading some of the books that include letters between friends. Some excellent options include "Chicken Soup for the Girlfriend's Soul" and "Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul: Real Deal Friends." Should you feel inspired, consider passing them along to friends to read.

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Write letters to friends—The obvious way to celebrate Write to a Friend Month is to actually put pen to paper and write to someone you haven't spoken to in awhile. Regular white lined paper is fine, but considering how rare it is that someone gets a handwritten letter, make it extra special by writing a letter on a beautiful piece of paper or in a decorative card. Once you start writing letters, think about keeping it up with a few friends rather than using email.

It's appropriate that Write to a Friend Month is in December considering there's quite a few Christmas cards that need to go out. Use both occasions as an excuse to start writing more letters and rely less on the instant gratification of technology.

Adapted from www.weekendnotes.com

HANDWASHING AWARENESS WEEK

The first week of December is Handwashing Awareness Week. Wash your hands to stay well. Handwashing is a simple, low cost, evidence-based intervention that can help protect your health and the health of others.

According to the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), proper hand hygiene is vital to lowering infectious disease transmission.

In fact, research has shown that handwashing lowers the rates of certain respiratory and gastrointestinal infections up to 23 and 48 percent, respectively.

According to the CDC, washing your hands frequently is particularly important to help prevent the spread of the new coronavirus known as SARS-CoV-2, which causes the disease known as COVID-19.

In this article, we'll look at the key steps to washing your hands correctly to ensure they're free of germs that can cause serious infections.

How to wash your hands. Below is the seven-step handwashing technique endorsed by the CDC and World Health Organization (WHO):

Steps to washing your hands properly

1. Wet your hands with clean – preferably running – water.
2. Apply enough soap to cover all surfaces of your hands and wrists.
3. Lather and rub your hands together briskly and thoroughly. Make sure to scrub all surfaces of your hands, fingertips, fingernails, and wrists.
4. Scrub your hands and wrists for at least 20 seconds.
5. Rinse your hands and wrists under clean – preferably running – water.
6. Dry your hands and wrists with a clean towel, or let them air-dry.
7. Use a towel to turn off the faucet.

The key to washing your hands is to make sure you thoroughly clean all surfaces and areas of your hands, fingers, and wrists.

After you've completed these steps, you can rinse and dry your hands.

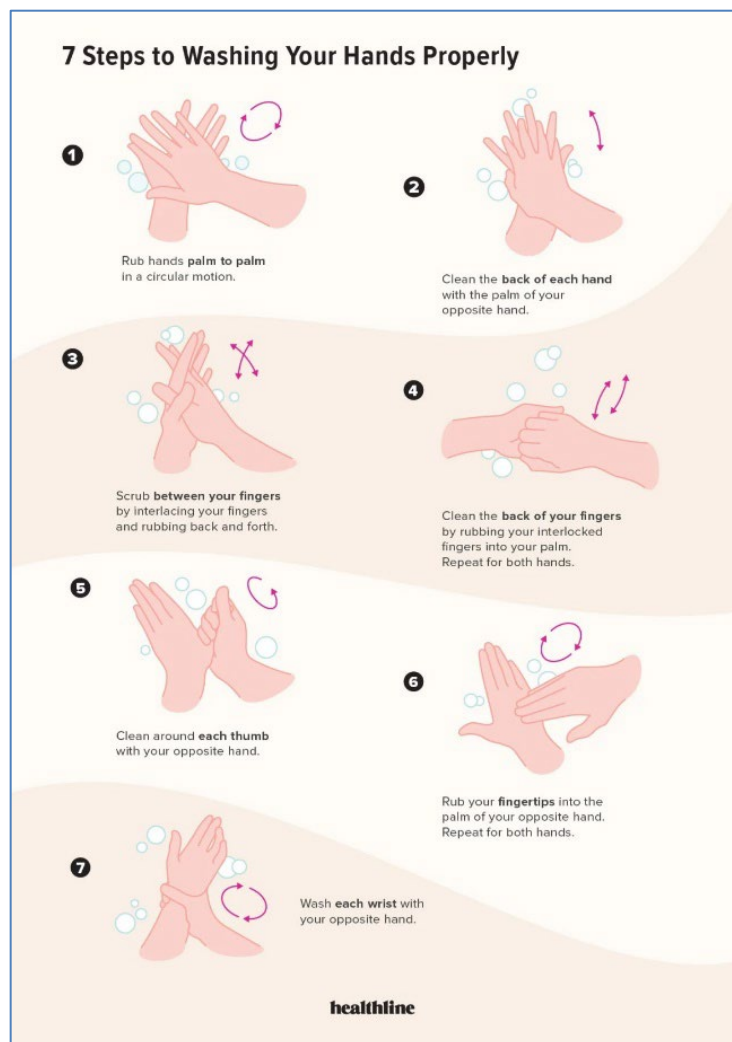
Does it matter what type of soap you use.

Plain soap is just as good at disinfecting your hands as over-the-counter antibacterial soaps. In fact, research has found that antibacterial soaps aren't any more effective at killing germs than regular, everyday soaps.

In 2017, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) banned the use of the antibacterial agents triclosan and triclocarban. The reasons cited by the FDA for the ban of these agents included:

- Antibacterial resistance
- Systemic absorption
- Endocrine (hormone) disruption
- Allergic reactions
- Overall ineffectiveness

So, if you happen to have older bottles of antibacterial soap stocked away, it's best not to use them. Throw them out, and just use regular soap instead.



Also, there's no evidence to suggest that the water temperature makes a difference. According to one study, washing your hands in warm water doesn't seem to get rid of more germs.

The bottom line is that it's safe to use whatever water temperature is right for you, and use any regular liquid or bar soap you have on hand.

When to wash your hands. Washing your hands is particularly important when you're in situations where you're more likely to acquire or transmit germs. This includes:

- before, during, and after you prepare food
- before and after you:
 - consume foods or drinks
 - are exposed to someone with an infectious illness
 - enter a hospital, doctor's office, nursing home, or other healthcare setting
 - clean and treat a cut, burn, or wound
 - take medication, such as pills or eye drops
 - use public transportation, especially if you touch railings and other surfaces
 - touch your phone or other mobile device
 - go to the grocery store
- after you:
 - cough, sneeze, or blow your nose
 - touch visibly dirty surfaces, or when there's visible dirt on your hands
 - handle money or receipts
 - have touched a gas pump handle, ATM, elevator buttons, or pedestrian crossing buttons
 - shake hands with others
 - engage in sexual or intimate activity
 - have used the bathroom
 - change diapers or clean bodily waste off others
 - touch or handle garbage
 - touch animals, animal feed, or waste
 - touch fertilizer
 - handle pet food or treats



How to prevent dry or damaged skin. Dry, irritated, raw skin from frequent handwashing can raise the risk of infections. Damage to your skin can change the skin flora. This, in turn, can make it easier for germs to live on your hands.

To keep your skin healthy while maintaining good hand hygiene, skin experts suggest the following tips:

- **Avoid hot water, and use a moisturizing soap.** Wash with cool or lukewarm water. Hot water isn't more effective than warm water, and it tends to be more drying. Opt for liquid (instead of bar) soaps that have a creamy consistency and include humectant ingredients, such as glycerin.
- **Use skin moisturizers.** Look for skin creams, ointments, and balms that help keep water from leaving your skin. These include moisturizers with ingredients that are:
 - **occlusive**, such as lanolin acid, caprylic/capric triglycerides, mineral oil, or squalene
 - **humectants**, such as lactate, glycerin, or honey
 - **emollients**, such as aloe vera, dimethicone, or isopropyl myristate
- **Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers that contain skin conditioners.** Alcohol-based hand sanitizers with humectants help ease skin dryness, while emollients replace some of the water stripped by alcohol.

Source: <https://www.healthline.com/health/7-steps-of-handwashing#dry-skin-prevention>

MEMORY BOOSTERS—How to start remembering the small stuff, and the big stuff, more easily



The next time you lose your keys or blank on the title of the movie you saw last week, resist the urge to Google “signs of early dementia,” counsels Charan Ranganath, director of the Dynamic Memory Lab at the University of California at Davis and author of *Why We Remember: Unlocking Memory’s Power to*

Hold On to What Matters.

“The majority of what we experience will be forgotten—and that’s by design,” says the neuroscientist. Indeed, the average person processes more than 74 gigabytes of information a day—nine DVDs’ worth.

We expect our memory to function as an archive of the past, Ranganath says. In reality, your brain selectively whittles and prunes what gets stored so it can perform its primary jobs, which include planning for the future (say, recalling what gave you joy as a child in order to create activities for your grandkids) while also understanding how your past shaped who you are (crucial to healing from trauma and boosting self-awareness). Other skills on your memory’s resume include decision-making, imagining and communicating.

For most adults, momentarily blanking on a friend’s name or misplacing a credit card don’t foreshadow imminent cognitive decline, through they do become increasingly common when we get older. (Not recognizing a friend or getting lost in familiar places, on the other hand, warrants concern.)

Our knowledge of the world and our lived experience “remain relatively intact in healthy aging,” and may even increase with age, says M. Natasha Rajah, a professor of psychology at Toronto Metropolitan University. That said, “recall and memory for contextual details (for example, where you parked your car in the lot) declines significantly, and this decline arises in midlife. Menopause negatively affects this type of memory in some females too.”

Which is why so many of us are still poking around, trying to find our keys. So consider these proven strategies to boost your memory make everyday life a little easier.

Reverse the ‘doorway effect.’ When you enter the kitchen with a sense of purpose, only to freeze—*Why did I*

come in here?—you’re experiencing what Ranganath calls an “event boundary,” commonly referred to as the “doorway effect.”

Whether you’re leaving a store, boarding a plane, walking from one room to another—any time your perception of your environment changes—your brain creates mental bookmarks called event boundaries that divide your day into distinct before-and-after sections for easier recall later on. If you’re in the living room when you realize you’ve left your eyeglasses in the kitchen, an event boundary is created the moment you enter the kitchen.

The problem, Ranganath says, is the brain is easily distracted by the fresh sights, sounds, thoughts and emotions accompanying any new event boundary, causing it to temporarily abandon the thoughts that led up to it. Unless you’re actively mentally repeating *get glasses from island* as you enter the kitchen, your brain will glom on to the new colors and smells (*Are those cookies?!*) and, *poof*, there goes your memory. (The same thing happens when you’re in the middle of a task and you stop to answer a phone call; you might struggle to remember what you were doing before the call came in.)

If you’ve lost the thread, try to recall what you were thinking about back in the previous room, or physically return to the room you were in.

Create a giant strawberry and make it ride a cow.

When five-time USA Memory Champion Nelson Dellis needs to memorize as many decks of cards as he can in an hour—his personal best is 20—he turns to mnemonics, a category of memory tools that includes creating outlandish visual images, like that cowboy berry. Other useful mnemonic tools include acronyms (Roy G. Biv, for the colors of the rainbow) and acrostics (My Very Excellent Mother Just Served Us Noodles, for the names of the planets).

Dellis, who was inspired to train for memory championships when his grandmother passed away from Alzheimer’s disease in 2009, says mnemonics work by turning mundane information into dazzling visuals. A grocery list containing strawberries, milk and broccoli is boring. A giant strawberry riding a cow into a backyard planted with cartoonish broccoli trees sticks out. Try it the next time you need to memorize directions, a to-do list or what floor of the parking garage you’re leaving your care on.

Source: AARP The Magazine December 2024/January 2025

DATES—Things to know

How to select—Choose shiny, intact dates that are consistent in color.

How to prepare—Remove the pit from fresh dates before eating. Dried dates are ready to eat.

How to store—Dates can be stored at room temperature for several months or refrigerated for 1 year. Keep dates in an airtight container.

Peak season—Fall, winter

Ways to use:

- Stuff dates with peanut butter for a protein-packed snack.
- Toss dates into a smoothie or milkshake.
- Toss dates into your favorite salad.
- Mix dates into tuna or chicken salad.
- Top cold cereal, oatmeal, or yogurt with dates.

Fun facts—Dates get their name from the Creek word “daktylos”, which means finger. Date pits are used to make soap and eyeliner. The date palm tree is the national symbol of Saudi Arabia. Egypt produces the most dates. Dates are a staple of Middle Eastern diets.

Nutrition info and facts—Dates contain calcium, zinc, iron, copper, and magnesium. The minerals present in dates can decrease blood pressure, risk of stroke, and labor complications. Fifteen dates provide all necessary vitamins and minerals.

3.5oz. serving of dates=277 calories, 75 g carbohydrate, 7 g fiber, 2 g protein, 15% DV potassium, 13% DV magnesium, 40% DV copper, 13% DV manganese, 5% DV iron, 15% DV vitamin B6.

Source: University of Minnesota, Healthline, 9 Proven health benefits of dates, October 13, 2022



DECEMBER 22 IS NATIONAL DATE NUT BREAD

I have included a recipe for Date Logs. My mother had this as a must make cookie for Christmas. What do you think? Do you have a favorite way to use dates?

Joni's Date Logs

Yields: 20-24 logs

½ cup butter or ½ cup margarine
1 cup sugar
3 cups dates, chopped
1 egg

1 teaspoon vanilla
½ cup walnuts, chopped
3 cups Rice Krispies
1 (7oz.) bag sweetened flaked coconut

Put butter, sugar, dates, and eggs in a heavy bottomed pan. Bring to boil over medium heat, and stir. When it starts to boil, stir constantly (about 10 minutes) until the liquid starts pulling away from the sides of the pan while you are stirring it, then remove from heat. Add vanilla, walnuts and Rice Krispies, and mix in well. Butter your hands and put enough mixture in the palm of your hand (about 2 T.). Roll into logs with your hands. The logs should be about 3" long by ½" wide. (The mixture will be hot, so be careful and work quickly). Roll each log in flaked coconut and place on waxed paper until completely cool. Store in a plastic container with cover.

Source: Food. Submitted by Lindas Busy Kitchen

ENERGY SAVING TIPS HELP OLDER ADULTS SAVE MONEY DURING WINTER MONTHS

Older adults on fixed incomes might find themselves looking for quick and easy ways to save money, and one of the first places people often look is to the heating bill.

To save money, many older adults set their thermostats dangerously low in winter. But why is turning down the heat a bad idea in the first place? Trying to save on heating costs may end up costing more if they develop hypothermia and have to go to the hospital. Hypothermia occurs when the body temperature drops to a dangerously low level. Only a few degrees of lower body temperature, such as 95 degrees Fahrenheit, is dangerous for a senior's wellness. Early signs of hypothermia include cold feet and hands, puffy or swollen face, pale skin, shivering, slower than normal speech or slurring words, acting sleepy or being angry or confused. Any of these signs in an older adult are reason to call your doctor. As a general recommendation, seniors should not set their thermostat any lower than 70 degrees to help keep safe during the winter.

Many find it difficult to absorb rising fuel costs. According to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), **some older adults spend more than 30 percent of their income for home energy costs**. Many will sell their valuables, borrow money, and forgo proper diet and visits to the doctor just to keep the heat on.

Older adults on a fixed income who are having trouble paying their utility bills, replacing a furnace or making energy improvements to their home can get financial help through the government's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The program is funded on the federal level but administered by the states. To find out how to apply in your state, call your local Aging and Disability Resource Center or your power company.

When the cold weather arrives, here are some simple things that older adults can do to help reduce monthly energy costs.

1. Caulk or weatherstrip windows and doors. Outside air can enter your home through leaks and cracks around your doors and windows. Check them, and if outdoor air is getting in, use caulk or weatherstripping in the necessary areas.

2. Get a programmable thermostat. Lowering or raising your home's temperature by 7 to 10 degrees for eight hours as you sleep can save \$100 a year. Get a programmable thermostat so you do not forget.

3. Use insulating plastic on your windows. The savings in annual energy costs can amount to more than 10% of your yearly heating bill.

4. Place foam gaskets behind light switch plate covers and electrical outlet covers. Electrical outlets and light switch plates are common places for air to leak into rooms, especially on outside walls. The foam gaskets are low-cost products that can be purchased at hardware stores. To install them all you have to do is unscrew the cover, put the gasket in place, and replace the cover (make sure you're using screws that are long enough).

5. Dress warmer. If you are still feeling a little cool, throw on a fluffy pair of sweatpants and a sweatshirt. A pair of snug socks also goes a long way in keeping us warm, since our extremities (like our feet and hands) are where a lot of our body heat escapes. Even wearing a warm hat indoors will help prevent heat loss through your head.

6. Use blankets. Much like dressing in warmer clothes, a warm blanket or throw can really keep you feeling toasty on a chilly day. They act as a barrier between you and the cold air outside and keep the warm air in around you. If you're cutting heating costs this winter, stock up on plenty of blankets to store around the house.

7. Close curtains/drapes when the sun goes down or when you are not home to retain heat. Letting sunlight in by opening curtains, blinds and shades over windows facing the sun helps keep your home warm and reduces heating needs. At night or when the sky is overcast, keeping drapes and curtains closed will help keep the warmth indoors.

8. Close doors and vents in unused rooms. If you have a room in your house that people rarely enter, you're wasting valuable energy heating it in the wintertime. Close off all vents in the room and shut all doors. This will prevent you from paying to heat uninhabited space.

9. Radiators and heaters: Make sure these are not blocked by furniture, curtains or other items. Make sure warm-air registers, heaters and radiators are clean.

10. Heating/cooling system maintenance. It is always a good idea to have your heating/cooling system cleaned before it becomes cold. Make sure it is in good working order. Do not forget to check your outside a/c unit to make sure there are no problems. Keep the area free of debris for best results. Change your air filters regularly. Have your ductwork inspected. Make sure all vents and registers are cleaned and free of blockage.

Source: University of Wisconsin-Madison

IDEAS TO CURB THE URGE TO BALANCE SEASONAL TREATS

Do you enjoy sweet foods such as cookies, cakes, pies and candy, especially during the holiday season? Most people do.

Eating too many highly sweetened foods and beverages can promote weight gain, cavities and other health issues, according to researchers. The American Heart Association says American adults consume 77 grams of sugar per day, and kids consume 81 grams per day. One teaspoon of sugar is about 5 grams, so this adds up to 15 to 16 teaspoons of sugar daily.

Try the following tips to help temper your sweet tooth this holiday season while still enjoying a moderate amount of the seasonal treats.

- Sip on hot tea instead of eggnog or hot chocolate. Tea comes in a variety of festive flavors such as cinnamon, orange spice, chai and peppermint. Add a splash of creamer if desired. Skipping these holiday drinks can save you up to 225 calories. One cup of eggnog can have 20 grams of sugar. Hot chocolate contains 25 grams of sugar.
- Choose naturally sweet fresh fruit. Recipe variations can make fruit fun. Try a fruit salad, dip, kabobs or parfait cup. Kiwis, oranges, persimmons, mandarins, apples, pears and grapefruits are some fruits that are in season in the U.S. during December. Many of these are delicious with a yogurt-based dip or make a great winter fruit salad.



- Bring a treat such as a festively decorated veggie tray. Arrange veggies in the shape of a snowman with a savory dip.
- Eat before you go to the party. Make sure to eat a balanced meal before heading to holiday gatherings. If this is not an option for you, try snacking on the meat, cheese or veggie tray before stopping by the cookie tray.
- Use a napkin to gather your goodies instead of a plate.
- Drink plenty of water with a splash of fruit juice. The Journal of Human Nutrition and Diabetics examined the dietary benefits of consuming plain water. They found that drinking more plain water was associated with reducing calories from sugar-sweetened beverages and foods, such as cookies and candy.

Source: NDSU Extension, Julie Garden-Robinson, Ph.D., R.D., L.R.D., Food and Nutrition Specialist

DECEMBER 13 IS NATIONAL COCOA DAY

I am sharing a Hot chocolate Mix that you can make and give as gifts this holiday.

Hot Chocolate Mix

2 cups confectioners' sugar

1 cup unsweetened cocoa powder

2 cups powdered milk or instant dry milk

In a large bowl, sift the confectioner's sugar, then the unsweetened cocoa, to get rid of any lumps. Stir the powdered milk, and whisk well until everything is combined. Add mini marshmallows to the container, if desired. This can be kept in the pantry for 6 months.

When you want to make hot cocoa, combine equal parts hot cocoa mix and hot water. Enjoy!

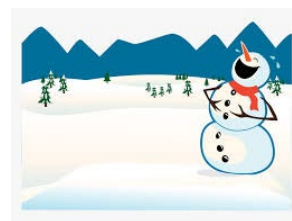
Note: As a guideline, ½ cup of cocoa mix and ½ cup hot water is the right amount for one serving.

Source: <http://thepioneerwoman.com>

JUST FOR LAUGHS

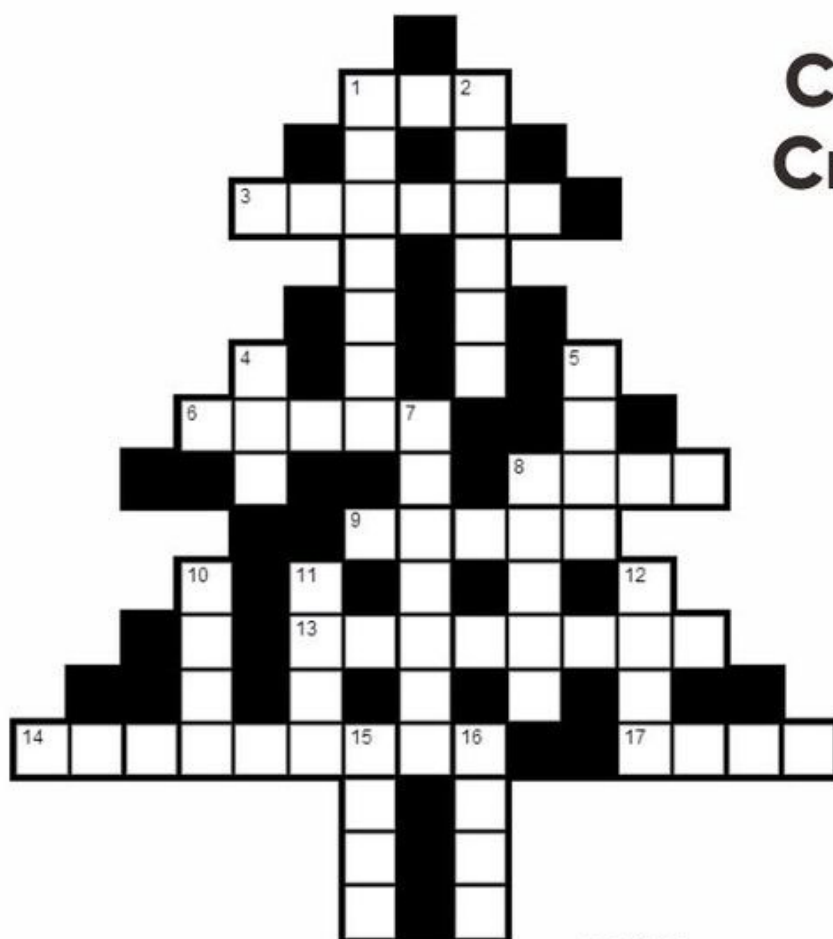
- What did Frosty's girlfriend give him when she was mad at him? The cold shoulder.
- What do gingerbread men use when they break their legs? Candy canes.
- What did the snowman say to the aggressive carrot? "Get out of my face."
- What do you call an old snowman? Water.
- Why did the Little Drummer Boy put his drum to bed? It was beat.
- Why are mummies such big fans of Christmas? Because they enjoy wrapping.
- What is every parent's favorite Christmas song? Silent Night!
- Why did Rudolph have to attend summer school? Because he went down in history.
- Why does Scrooge love Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer? Because every buck is dear to him!
- What did Adam say on the day before Christmas? "It's Christmas, Eve!"
- What's the absolute best Christmas present? A broken drum — you can't beat it!
- What do grapes sing at Christmas? 'Tis the season to be jelly.
- Who is never hungry at Christmas? The turkey — he's always stuffed.

Source: <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/holidays/christmas-ideas/a35399/christmas-jokes/>



CROSSWORD PUZZLE DAY IS DECEMBER 21ST

This activity can be another activity to keep mental sharpness.



Christmas Crossword

ACROSS

1. Pumpkin or mincemeat
3. Santa's ride
6. Celebration
8. Newborn
9. Northpole crew
13. Word of praise
14. Words on a Christmas card
17. It's opened on Christmas

DOWN

1. Alternative word to 17 across
2. Christmas drink
4. Christmas dinner centerpiece
5. Dec. holiday
7. Christmas warmer
8. "Jingle _____"
10. Christmas tree
11. O. Henry's "The Gift of the ____"
12. What carolers do
15. French Christmas.
16. Snow glider