## Christmas cookies made simple

Baking cookies is a holiday tradition for moliday season, many oliday season, man omes are flled with the cinnamon and melting hocolate.
Baking cookies can be a social occasion in which family members and friends gather to cre ate recipes passed down hrough generations. Or baking can be a solitary venture in which cookies are prepared and pack aged as holiday gifts.

## Cards

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 Turn favorite Christmas cards into mementos that an be saved year after year, which also will dress up refrigerators or ther magnetic surfaces. This idea works well for photo greeting cards as well.- Make Christmas card ornaments. Use the shaped ornaments for the ree. Cards can be turned into block shapes and hung with ribbon. Another idea is to punch out circles or ovals from the ards and tile them on a oam egg to look like a multicolored pine cone Explore your creative side and decorate your - Create greeting Create greeting card garlands. Display ards by stringing them together and hanging them from the mantle or another prominent area. If cards are too large, fom the cards and then attach those disks to heavy thread.


## Avoid

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Eat before you go shopping. Leaving the house hungry may tempt you to make impulse food purchases that can compromise healthy diets. It's easy o grab a quick convenience item at the food court or from a vending machine. However, eating a snack before you leave will alleviate hunger and you can ontrol the foods that go into your body
Make smarter food choices. When visiting a holiday party buffet line or grabbing an on-the-go nack, think about the foods you choose. Look fo ow-calorie items that will still fill you up. Proteins, complex carbohydrates and vegetables are good choices. Avoid creamy dips and dressings, and if you want to try something fried or cheese-laden, do so nly sparingly

- Be selective with sweets. Sweets are readily available during the holiday season. Rather than filling up your plate with a little "bite" of each dessert you want to try, select your favorite and then enjoy a nable portion.
- Limit sampling while cooking. If you are enter ining others, cut down on tasting while you prepare meal. Those calories can add up without you nowing it, and soon you've eaten an entire portion before the festivities begin.
Pack healthy snacks. It's always a good idea o have healthy snacks at the ready to tame random hunger pangs. Bring a favorite treat with you while shopping or if you will be visiting others. This helps you control your portion size and can keep you from ereating.
Mind your drinks, too. Many beverages, includ ing alcoholic beverages and sweetened soft drinks, re high in calories. A single serving of wine can have anywhere from 100 to 300 calories. It's easy to lose count of caloric intake when indulging, but opt or low-calorie drinks or water whenever possible
- Increase your level of physical activity. Find ways to remain physically active during the holiday an walk a greater distance and burn more calories. Take a few extra laps around the mall. Opt for the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator. If you're at a party with upbeat music, get on the dance floor and work off some calories.
Holiday weight gain may seem like an inevitabil ity. However, with some forward thinking and smart choices, holiday celebrants can prevent weight gain this holiday season.


## from scratch? It's the

 thought that counts, and any number of creative recipes can begin by utilizing a premade bak ing mix. These mixes already have most of the dry cookie ingredients sifted together, includ ing flour, baking soda, baking powder, salt, and sugar. All you have to do is add the wet ingredients and any extra embellishments to make the mix your own. If mixes are too much work, purchase refrigerated or frozen cookie dough. Include your own add-ins, such as nuts, white chocolate chips, bits of dried fruit, or crumbled candy cane to give the premade dough a unique flavor.- Prepare ahead. Many cookie dough recipes can be made and stored for be made and stred later use. In fat, refrig erating a log or cookio dough can make it easie Spread out the bulk of Spread out the bulk of
your baking over two days and you might fee less taxed

Try a no-bake recipe Creative culinary expert continually reveal their clever tricks, and many of these include no-bake versions of favorite desserts. No bake cook ies come together in a matter of minutes, but still employ a host of delicious ingredients. Recipes frequently feature similar ingredients to traditional cookies but rely on chocolate, but rey or pean butt honey or peana butter the setlog agent kee them together. Bakers may also like not having to turn on their oven

Recycle leftover cookies. If you have a fair amount of cookies remaining or several that broke apart or do not look good enough to serve, never fear. Such cookies can be used as part of another delicious dessert. Grind cookies into crumbs that can serve as a pie crust for pudding pies or no-bak cheesecakes, or mix cookie crumbs with cake frosting or a nut butter and roll into balls. Dunk the balls into melted chocolate, add a lollipo stick and make delicious cookie pops.
Cookies may be holiday traditions, but there are ways to reduce the amount of work and time required of holiday bak ing.

## Facts

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Christmas trees. Germans are credited with bringing the first Christmas trees into the home and decorat ing them in the spirit of Christmas. The first recorded reference to the Christmas tree dates back to the 16th century - Tree farms are beneficial to the environment because they reduce the amount of carbon diox ide in the air and help counter global warming. The most common Christmas tree species are balsam fir, Douglasfir, Fraser fir, noble fir, Scotch pine, Virginia pine and white pine.

- Christmas trees can be recycled into mulch.

Make holiday shopping excursions special

As they fulfill the social obligations of the holiday season, many people find themselves spending less time at home. Consumer Repor notes that individual time shopping for gifts time shopping for gifts come the holiday season, Americans engage in 15 hours of shopping on average, with women spending twice as long as
their male countert their male counterparts (20 hours versus 10). In addition, the average person devotes 10 or more hours to wrapping and returning gifts.
Holiday shopping can monopolize people's time away from home during the months of N vember and December, and some shoppers won der how they become so disconnected from other activities, including fam acty time, that they cheris throughout the rest the year One way to year. One way to tacke

## Did you know?

onymous with Santa Claus and onymos whe the North Pole
cold weather, is actually much warmer than the South Pole. That's because the North Pole sits at a lower elevation than the South Pole,
and it is located in the middle and it is located in the middle
of an ocean. The South Pole, the other hand, is located on the continent of Antarctica, which is covered in ice. But Santa fans mulling a trip to the North Pole to visit jolly old St. Nick migh
want to think otherwise, as want to think otherwise, as are less than welcoming. Summertime temperatures at the North Pole, for example, hover right at the freezing point. In addition, because of the way
Earth rotates, the North Pole Earth rotates, the North Pole
experiences just one sunrise and one sunset each year. However, because the sun is always above the horizon in the summer and below the horizon in the winter, the North Pole
actually experiences 24 hours actualy experiences 24 hours zero hours of sunlight in the winter. While children in North America know the North Pole as home to Santa Claus, that's legend of Santa Claus, a story that some historians suggest traces its origins all the way back to the third century. Historians credit famed 19th century caricaturist and editorial cartoonist Thomas Nast with bein
the first to link Santa Claus and his workshop to the North Pole. However, many Nordic countries continue to say Santa Claus lives in their territories.
family and friends is to make holiday shopping social event.

Invite friends or fam ily along. Recreate the days of your youth when it was fun to meet friends at the mall and scour the shops. Plan a meeting location and have an itinerary in place. Divide shopping lists so that everyone shares the task of shopping and fatigue doesn't set in prematurely.

- Make lunch or dinne part of the day. Incorporate refueling into your shopping plans. Failure to eat or drink can lead to hunger pangs and test shoppers' patience, two factors that are seldom conducive to successful shopping. Having an end goal to meet friends or family at a nearby or family at a nearby ing location right within he mall - can in within he mail can inspie their work done to get their work done promptly. Reward yourself for a job well done over a tasty meal and maybe a cocktail. Just be sure to indulge responsibly.
- Break up the day with a flick. Many malls also play home to movie


## Tots

continued from page 16 - Schedule some fu time. While parent pressed for time migh do anything but shep do anything but shop, kids are likely to grow impatient if the day does not include at least one fun distraction. Look for malls or shopping centers that feature fun things for kids to do, such as carousel rides or visits with Santa Claus. While this might require parents to spend more time at the mall or shopping center than they initially hoped, it can help keep kids engaged while giving them something fun to do at the same time.
Parents who must take their kids along on holiday shopping excur holiday shopping excu sions such trips fun for all involved. all involved.


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