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FAMILY MATTERS

PARENTING WITH LISA SALMON



Keeping kids happy over Christmas

ALTHOUGH we think of Christmas as being a celebration for the kids, there are lots of boring, grown-up parties they have to attend, too.

Charlotte Melia, MD of bespoke party planning company Dazzle & Fizz, says: "Keeping the children entertained in the build-up to Christmas can be tricky. With Christmas adverts everywhere, the whole focus can seem to be overtly commercial.

"There are lots of ways to entertain the children without spending a fortune, however.

"Here are our top three festive activities to keep the children engaged, without a battery-operated toy in sight!"

Alternative advent calendar

For this, you will need either a reusable advent calendar, or 24 empty containers (jars with lids, or miniature fabric bags work well). Number the containers one to 24. In each container, write a charitable activity or positive task for the family to complete.

For example 1) Donate three canned goods to your local food bank. 2) Pick a toy to donate to a children's charity. 3) Spend time with an elderly relative. Complete each task as a family to redefine the spirit of Christmas and focus on giving as opposed to receiving.

Christmas treasure hunt around the house

Keep the children entertained for hours with a cryptic treasure hunt around the house. Be aware of the age range of the audience and adapt the clues to suit. If you have a wide age range, organise the children into mixed-age teams, each with an older child as a team leader. The clues should be Christmas themed and build towards an end prize. Elongate the fun by choosing an end prize that requires making or creating. For example, hide a loot-bag filled with make-your-own-snow-globes as the end gift. The children can then build their snow globes straight after as a new activity.

Keep them active

As the cold nights draw in, it can be hard to keep children active. This can be a double problem, as children will inevitably eat a lot more treats at this time of year.

Overcome this by encouraging active games that the children can play together.

If you're tight on space, choose a competition that can be completed as individuals, such as a Wii tournament to keep them excited, engaged and active. It's an oldie, but a goodie - a game of Twister is active, fun and can be enjoyed by everyone.

Or better still, take the whole family on a scavenger-hunt-style nature walk. Select 10 items the children must find or see on the walk, ticking each item off as you go.

For more inspiration visit the Dazzle & Fizz website at dazzleandfizz.co.uk.

DON'T OVERDO THE EATING AND BOOZE

HEALTH

With Dr Zak Uddin



Dr Zak offers a guide to enjoying the festive season in good health

WITH the preparations for the special day now at fever pitch, it can be very comforting to have something pleasant to focus your energies on, at a time of year when reduced levels of daylight might otherwise have some of us feeling a bit low.

Although it is natural and indeed necessary to let your hair down, getting too caught up in the so-called "festive spirit", might not actually bring you the happiness you expect.

Here, I share what I hope may help you enjoy Christmas without some of the nasty side effects.

Alcohol: With the UK Government now advising a maximum of 14 units spread out over the week, there will be plenty of opportunity to exceed this, even at a single sitting. By alternating alcoholic beverages with soft drinks or water, not only will you reduce the total amount you consume, but you may escape a nasty hangover too. Please be aware that if you have had a heavy night, there is every likelihood that you will still be over the limit to drive the next morning.

Food: The traditional Christmas dinner contains a massive 3,000 calories, or to put this in perspective, more than an average man would need in a day. Although it can be very tempting,



PACE YOURSELF: The average Christmas dinner amounts to a whopping 3,000 calories, so try not to overdo it

try to avoid piling your plate high. If anything, this may reduce your enjoyment as you will feel under pressure to finish it all. Eat your food slowly, chewing every mouthful. Studies show that doing this allows you to better gauge when you are actually full.

Social inclusion: Christmas can actually be a very lonely time of the year for many people, and also particularly poignant if you have lost someone dear at this time. With temperatures dropping, take it upon yourself to drop in and visit an elderly neighbour, or someone who lives on their own

and may not have much regular human contact. It will only be an hour of your time, but it will make their week, as well as giving you that warm glow inside.

Avoiding confrontation: You may be invited to spend Christmas with others, or vice versa, and although the spirit is often good at the start, small arguments can rapidly escalate into full on confrontation.

This will not help you or the other person, and can make it incredibly stressful.

Remember anything said in the heat of the moment, even if not

really meant, still may be recalled long after.

Going into debt: With record numbers of individuals going into debt at Christmas, the disappointing reality is that most people won't recall soon after what they were bought for Christmas; with many returning or swapping or returning gifts in the January sales.

Ideally spend only what you can afford. Christmas is a time for giving; but giving your time, efforts and affection will always count for more than any material gift.

Have I got an STI from sex at office party?

Q: I've had unprotected sex at an office party with someone I don't really know. I'm worried about the risks of STIs but too ashamed to go and get tested – Andrea, 21

A: It sounds like you are quite distressed, and what you need is peace of mind. It is important to remember that even if you have picked up an STI, you may not have any of the traditional symptoms of itch, pain or abnormal discharge. However, if left untreated, they can cause a whole host of problems, and even infertility later on. There are dedicated clinics where you can walk in and be tested for every STI, including HIV. Any positive result can be treated rapidly, and a negative result will allow you to stop worrying. None of this will go in your GP notes and you will be able to put the episode behind you.

Q: I have struggled with migraines since being a teenager, but didn't really know that anything could be done.

My GP has suggested a medication called Topiramate, but I am frightened because I've read it's used to treat epilepsy – Sharon, 30

A: The treatment of migraine normally starts by managing the event itself. However if your symptoms last more than a few days each time, or you have several migraines a month, many experts would recommend trying a medication to prevent the migraines happening in the first place. Among those approved is Topiramate, which as you correctly point out, is also used to treat epilepsy. It is important to let your GP know if you are trying for a baby, as Topiramate has been linked with increased risk of cleft lip and palate. Also it may reduce the

effectiveness of some hormonal contraceptives, so this would need to be addressed.

If you have a question for Dr Zak, please email: askdoctorzak@gmail.com

W: doctorzak.co.uk

T: @AskDoctorZak

Dr Uddin's advice is provided in good faith and in accordance with currently accepted evidence.

However, this content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

You should always seek the advice of a GP, or other qualified health provider, regarding a medical condition.