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How To Choose Healthy Gifts

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(WebMD) Who needs messy turtledoves and partridges when you can give the gift of better health to the adults and kids on your list – without breaking the bank?

WebMD turned to experts to get 12 suggestions for healthy holiday gifts.

1. Jump rope. "When you think about muscles," Cedric X. Bryant, PhD, tells WebMD, "you realize they don't have little brains inside to know whether you are using a \$2,000 piece of equipment or a \$15 jump rope." Bryant is chief exercise physiologist for the American Council on Exercise (ACE). ACE recommends a jump rope for kids and fit adults. A 30-minute session at moderate speed can melt 250 calories off of a 130-pound person. For kids, jump ropes are great – revive a forgotten art! But Rita Beckford, MD, tells WebMD that jumping rope is not for the seriously overweight because it is a high-impact exercise. Beckford is a family practitioner and director of the Twinsburg Urgent Care Center in Cleveland.

2. Heart rate monitor. You can find these for around \$50, although some are higher. "These are great for people who have just started exercising regularly," Beckford says. "Getting up to 70% or 80% of your maximum heart rate is excellent for fat burning."

3. Pedometer. These can make you mindful of how much you are moving, Beckford says. She has upped the old conventional wisdom of a goal of 5,000 steps a day to 10,000, a challenge for the new year.

4. Body bands. Color coded by the resistance they provide, body bands are great stocking stuffers, but you might want to include a good instruction book or video, Beckford says. Unlike weights, these don't have the potential to drop on your toe or smack you in the face, but they must be used correctly. They are also great for seniors, she says.

5. Stationary frame for your road bike. "You can get one for around \$50," Bryant says. "This makes your bike into an exercise bike."

6. Exercise tapes or videos. Beckford created an exercise video, *At Home with Dr. B*, out of necessity. She was trying to shed 90 pregnancy pounds and was working out after hours in her urgent-care center. Soon her staff, then patients, then patients with their children, asked to join her. She then was asked to bring her workout to other centers and had to create the video to spread the popular program. If your recipient gets bored with certain tapes or videos, research good "walking" music that can be loaded on iPods. Bryant says a portable CD player, way under \$50, can also do the trick.

7. Starter lesson in karate, swimming, boxing, or Pilates. A Pilates mat is also a good present under this budget.

For Kids and Sports-Minded Adults

8. Assorted balls. With kids packing on the pounds, the holidays are a nice time to think about exercising as a family. Audrey Cross, PhD, a professor at the School of Public Health at Columbia University, says soccer is fun for adults and kids. "It develops good eye-foot coordination," she jokes. A volley ball and net, badminton set, or a basketball are also under \$50. What house should be without a ball? If a portable basketball hoop is too expensive, see if there is a giveaway list in your area. Go to Freecycle.org and sign up to offer and pick up items for free.

9. Double-sided countertop grill. Those little grills are helping everyone eat meat and veggies prepared in a healthier manner, according to Beckford. "They are so simple to use," JoAnna M. Lund, author of the health exchange cookbook series and *Cooking Healthy with the Kids in Mind*, agrees. She tells WebMD that kids can grill with these if properly supervised.

10. Apron for each child. Lund loves to cook with her eight grandchildren. "They all have an apron and put it on first thing when they visit and we make something," she says. "I am not stirring up food, I am stirring up memories they will always have."

11. Blender or juicer. "You can 'cook' great treats using a blender," Lund says. For kids, this is a painless way to get servings of fruit and milk. Children also like to use a salad spinner, another great gift, and will appreciate implements with chunkier, easier-to-hold handles than the sharp wire-handled carrot peeler found in every kitchen.

12. Healthy foods themselves. A gourmet basket of fruit, an assortment of nuts, bottles of almond or olive oil or balsamic vinegar, are all great gifts, Cross suggests. A plastic chopping board that washes free of meat juices is also a thoughtful present.

"Anything," Cross laughs. "but a deep-fat fryer. That would be an awful present!"

Happy holidays. all -- and good eating and playing!

By Star Lawrence
Reviewed by Louise Chang, MD
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