

# The UConn Buzz



## Have a Mindful December

### Mindful Eating

How many of us have spent hours in the kitchen preparing an amazing meal only to have it served and eaten in fifteen minutes? This can be very frustrating for those who took the time to find recipes, buy ingredients, slice and dice fixings, wait for the perfect moment to remove something from the oven and share it with family and friends. Unfortunately with busy schedules and the many distractions in our lives, something as natural and basic as eating and food often gets taken for granted. Mindful eating, with roots in Buddhism, is a great technique to slow down and fully appreciate the food we are consuming. Maintaining an awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and surrounding environment will allow us to master this method that can be helpful in weight management and allow for more conscious dietary decisions. You may already be doing something similar to this with a toast, prayer, or your own traditional way of giving thanks before a meal. However, mindful eating encompasses awareness to many things and should be incorporated often with everything we eat for healthier food choices and a healthier you!

So how does one mindfully eat? Challenge yourself to try the following. When you are about to consume something you want to be completely present in the moment and focusing on the task of eating. You should be sitting, with no outside distractions such as driving, watching TV or checking your cellphone. You want all your senses available and ready to concentrate, not just your taste buds. First, you should think about your **SATIETY AND HUNGER LEVELS**. Are you truly

hungry or just eating because you are bored or stressed? After deciding you have a physical feeling of hunger carefully **LOOK** at the food available & **OBSERVE** the color, texture and presentation of it. Take a moment to think about **WHERE THE FOOD CAME FROM** before ending up on your plate (did it originate from a seed? was it cultivated on a farm or in a factory? what kind of labor, packaging and transportation brought it to the store and then to you?). Then consider **HOW IT WAS PREPARED**, cooking method, what spices were added, and note any **SMELLS** of what you are about to eat. Next, try a **SMALL BITE** and savor the **TEXTURE** (is it smooth? crunchy?) and **FLAVORS** (is it sweet, spicy, or salty? do they change?) as you **THOROUGHLY CHEW** it before swallowing it. **PUT YOUR FORK DOWN** after the first bite and continue to appreciate the lingering taste of the food. This may involve not talking for a few moments during the meal but really **CONTEMPLATING** what you are eating. Continue to **USE ALL YOUR SENSES** with every bite, pausing and taking deep breaths in between chewing. Be conscious of outside distractions, keep yourself engaged with the meal and monitor your level of fullness throughout the exercise. You may be surprised to find you eat less and are more aware of your internal satiety cues with this focus on mindfulness. It may take a few tries but don't give up on this fantastic way to get the most out of your meal at the holidays and any time of the year. It is likely that once you start doing this, you will consider your food choices more carefully and this will become a habit. So give this a go the next time you have a snack or meal!

- [Do you mindfully eat quiz?](#)
- [Quick and easy tips to mindfully eat](#)
- [Try out mindful eating yourself](#)

### Mindful Gift Giving

It's that time of year again. The holiday season is upon us and the annual ritual of shopping and gift giving is in full swing. Exchanging gifts is a major part of how we celebrate this time of year. We often put a lot of thought into finding the perfect present for the special people in our lives. However, we may give less thought to the impact it can have on the environment.

With a few simple changes, you can have a big effect on the amount of trash created during the holiday season. According to one [report](#) there is 5% more trash during the Thanksgiving to New Year's holiday period than any other time of year. The extra waste amounts to 25 million tons of garbage. If every American family wrapped just 3 presents in re-used materials, it would save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields. What can you do to decrease all this excess?

- Use wrappings that will not go to waste, such as a gift bag, or make the packing part of the gift itself.
- Buy consumable gifts instead such as organic coffee, essential oils, or fair trade teas
- Give the gift of yourself. Offer to help with chores or babysit to let your friends/family have a night out.
- Give the gift of experiences: a gift certificate to a massage, go out to dinner, a movie, a sporting event, or anything that lets you to spend time together,
- Buy local. This will help support your community and saves on emissions and fuel use from shipping.

[Click here for more tips to reduce waste](#)

## HAPPENINGS AROUND TOWN

[Artists' Open Studio](#) - Multiple locations, Saturday & Sunday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>, 10am-5pm

[Ugly Sweater Run](#) – Bushnell Park, Hartford, Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 11am

[Scrooge Scramble 5K Road Race](#)  
Prospect and School St, Rockville, Sunday, December 25<sup>th</sup>, 10:30am

[The Coventry Winter Farmers' Market](#)  
Coventry High School Café, 78 Ripley Road, Coventry, Sundays, 11 am to 2 pm

Sources for this issue of The Buzz include: Use Less Stuff Report, U.S. PIRG, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, KidsHealth, Prevent Blindness, Center for Mindful eating, The Mindfulness Diet.org

## Chocolate Banana-Walnut Torte

### Ingredients

- 2 c walnut halves or pieces, toasted
- 12 oz low-fat banana or vanilla yogurt
- 1 c mashed bananas (about 3)
- 1/2 c graham cracker crumbs
- 1 tsp grated lemon zest
- 1/4 tsp cinnamon
- 4 lg egg whites
- 1/4 tsp cream of tartar
- 3/4 c dark chocolate chips
- 3 Tbsp half-and-half



### Instructions

1. **HEAT** oven to 350°F. Lightly coat 9" round cake pan with cooking spray. Line pan with parchment, then lightly coat paper and sides of pan with cooking spray.
2. **CHOP** 1/3 cup of the walnuts and set aside for garnish. Pulse remaining nuts in food processor or blender until finely ground.
3. **STIR** together yogurt, bananas, crumbs, lemon zest, cinnamon, and ground walnuts in large bowl. Set aside.
4. **BEAT** egg whites in bowl with electric mixer on medium speed until foamy. Add cream of tartar and continue beating on high until stiff peaks form, about 2 minutes. Stir small amount of whites into yogurt mixture with rubber spatula. Fold in remaining egg whites just until incorporated.
5. **POUR** mixture into prepared pan, smoothing top. Bake until top is firm to touch and wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, 30 to 35 minutes. Cool in pan on rack 20 minutes. Run knife around sides of pan and invert torte onto rack. Remove parchment and chill 1 hour.
6. **COMBINE** chocolate and half-and-half in small microwavable bowl. Microwave on high 30 seconds and stir. Repeat until chips are melted. Cool 2 minutes.
7. **PLACE** cake on rack. Cover sides and top with chocolate mixture using cake spatula. To garnish, press reserved walnuts on sides of torte. Chill until chocolate is set, about 30 minutes.

## December is Safe Toys and Gifts Awareness Month

For more than 30 year a non-profit, non-partisan research and advocacy group US PIRG has been distributing the "[Trouble in Toyland](#)" report. This focuses on toys that have been recalled, contain dangerous chemicals, or pose a choking hazard to children. The annual report is released in November right before the holiday season to help inform consumers. It contains color pictures of the toy as well as the reason it is hazardous.

According to the [U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission](#) the U.S. had 251,800 toy related injuries in 2015, with 44% of the injuries to the head and face area. An estimated 84,400 of all toy-related injuries(34 %) happened to children younger than 5 years of age.

[Prevent Blindness](#) and [KidsHealth](#) offers tips on how to purchase safe toys for kids:

- Avoid toys that shoot or include parts that fly off.
- Consider whether other smaller children may be in the home that may have access to the toy.
- Avoid purchasing toys with sharp or rigid points, spikes, rods, or dangerous edges.
- Look for the letters "ASTM." This designation means the product meets the national safety standards set by ASTM International.
- Magnets, like those found in building sets and other toys, can be extremely harmful if swallowed.
- Don't give toys with small parts to young children. Young kids tend to put things in their mouths, increasing the risk of choking. If any part of a toy can fit in a

toilet paper roll, the toy is not appropriate for children under the age of 3.

- Do not purchase toys with long strings or cords, especially for infants and very young children as these can become wrapped around a child's neck.
- Always dispose of uninflated or broken balloons immediately.

Be Well is an employee wellness program provided through the Eastern Highlands Health District with funding from the CT Dept. of Public Health. The goal of the program is to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

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