

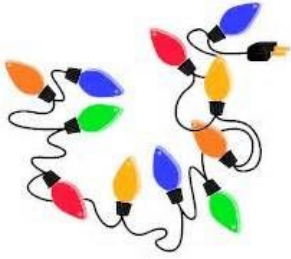


Family and Consumer Sciences

# Strengthening Oklahoma Families

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December 2014  
Merry Christmas



## Can Holiday Lights Be a Health Hazard?

Now that all the turkey and dressing leftovers, along with the last piece of Aunt Edna’s special pecan pie, have been consumed, it is time to get serious about decking the halls for the holidays.

For some Oklahomans, the holiday season is synonymous with blinking and twinkling lights, both indoors and outdoors, said Gina Peek, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension housing and consumer specialist.

“While we may be aware of the increase in the use of electricity during this time, most consumers are probably unaware that some Christmas lights contain lead,” Peek said. “In fact, a study from a few years ago found at least four common brands of lights contained levels of lead that exceeded the Consumer Product Safety Commission’s standard for products to which children are exposed.”

Research is increasingly showing exposure to lead, especially by children, can be hazardous to a person’s health and is implicated in a wide range of health concerns.

Fortunately, there is good news. The actual amount of exposure to lead from Christmas lights is likely to be relatively low - unless you leave lights up all year.

“Consumers are much more likely to be exposed to dangerous amounts of lead from deteriorating paints, jewelry, miniblinds, artificial Christmas trees, ceramics or contaminated soils,” she said.

Lead from Christmas lights can be ingested from hand-to-mouth contact after handling lights, so it is best if the stringing of lights be left to the adults in the household. Lead also can be released into the air during installation and removal.

“Researchers recommend children not handle the lights, and anyone who does should wash their hands immediately after handling,” she said.

Peek said the presence of lead in the lights is not accidental. Lead is intentionally applied to the polyvinylchloride (PVC) coating on the wiring in an effort to prevent the plastic from cracking and crumbling. The PVC also helps protect the strings of lights from heat and moisture, as well as to act as a flame retardant.

Some of the newer products are starting to have warning labels, but this action is not widespread.

“It’s important for consumers to be aware Christmas lights aren’t the only lead hazard in the home” Peek said. “Although American manufacturers have been moving away from using lead as a PVC stabilizer in the last few years, if your appliances or Christmas lights are several years old, it’s likely they contain lead.”

So while the bright colored lights add definitely add an air of festivity to your holiday decorations, it is in everyone’s best interest to be cautious with them.

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## Protect Your Credit Cards..... *this holiday season*

Source: *Modern Woodmen*

In the U.S. alone, we use our credit cards more than 26.2 billion times each year, according to the 2013 Federal Reserve Payments Study. With the holiday shopping season nearly upon us, (*it's really already here*) it's important to use caution and take steps to avoid credit card theft and fraud. What should you do?

1. **Check your statements carefully.** If unrecognized items show up, contact the credit card company immediately.
2. **When making online purchases, look for a security icon** (*often a padlock symbol*) and carefully read the URL address to make sure you have not landed on a copycat site.
3. **Make sure your card is back in your wallet,** not on the store counter or in the clerk's pocket.
4. **Never leave your cards** in a drawer at work or the glove box of your car. These are the first places thieves look.
5. **Report missing cards** immediately.
6. **Destroy unwanted or expired cards.** Cut up cards so no one can read the numbers.

7. **Memorize your ATM pin number.** Don't carry it in your wallet.

Federal laws and company policies also limit your loss. Under the Fair Credit Billing Act, your maximum liability for unauthorized use of your credit card is \$50.



## Chop Test: A New Way to Prepare Vegetables

Source: *Food and Health*

There's a new approach in town and this one will offer all the tools you need in order to prepare vegetables in healthful & tasty ways. It's called the **chop test**. If a vegetable is physically **hard to chop**, then that vegetable will take longer to cook. Cook it until it is tender & don't worry too much about overcooking. Stick a knife or fork into the vegetable. When that vegetable yields easily to such prodding, then it's done.

If a vegetable is **easy to slice**, then it will cook much more quickly. Cook gently until just crisp-tender, paying careful attention to doneness. These vegetables are more finicky than the hard to chop options—overcooking will make them mushy and

less palatable. Some vegetables **should not be cooked** because they are easy to slice and very high in water content. This is more of a cooking lesson than the rest, because easy of chopping is not a factor. These vegetables include avocado, cucumbers, lettuce, radishes and sprouts. There are a few **exceptions**, just as there are with any rule. For example, some greens are an exception because they are easy to cut but need longer cooking to make them tender & palatable. Then there are tomatoes, which mellow over time if you are making a sauce.

## Winning Snacks for Game Day

Here are some tasty ideas to keep your winning snack on game a little lighter:



- ♦ **Olives:** Eat them whole or chop them up and enjoy tapenade style as a dip with veggies or with baked tortilla chips.
- ♦ **Turkey roll-ups with avocado:** Take lettuce, a slice of turkey and a sliver of avocado with a little pesto. Roll'em up and secure with a toothpick.
- ♦ **Meatballs:** You can easily make beef, turkey or chicken meatballs that are sneakily healthful.
- ♦ **Shrimp:** Put a spin on shrimp cocktail by adding some spice and cooking them on the grill or in a pan.
- ♦ **Stuffed mini peppers or mushrooms:** Stuff with other veggies and a little cheese, and you have the perfect finger food.
- ♦ **Kebabs:** Load some skewers with chicken, veggies or steak and then grill.
- ♦ **Pigs in a Blanket:** Cut small pieces of Crescent rolls and wrap a little smokies—bake until done.....they won't last long.



# Pittsburg County OHCE Newsletter

## Hands-Free Systems Can Lead to Driver Distraction

Source Home & Away December 2014

With 75% of drivers believing hands-free technology is safe, Americans may be surprised to learn these popular new vehicle features may increase distraction, according to new research by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. The good news for consumers is that it is possible to design hands-free technologies that are less cognitively distracting, according to the research.

The results, which build on the first phase of the foundation’s research conducted last year, suggest that developers can improve the safety of their products by making them less complicated, more accurate and generally easier to use. As manufacturers work to refine systems that reduce distractions, AAA encourages drivers to minimize cognitive distraction by limiting the use of most voice-based technologies.

Everyone knows that drivers can miss stop signs, pedestrians and other cars while using voice

technologies because their mind is not fully focused on the road ahead. Using instrumented test vehicles, heart-rate monitors and other equipment designed to measure reaction times, researchers evaluated and ranked—using a five-category system—common voice-activated interactions based on the level of cognitive distraction generated. And the results show:

- The accuracy of voice recognition software significantly influences the rate of distraction. Systems with low accuracy and reliability generated a high level (*category 3*) of distraction.
- Composing text messages and e-mails using in-vehicle technologies (*category 3*) was more distracting than using these systems to listen to messages (*category 2*).



- The quality of the systems’ voice had no impact on distraction levels—listening to a natural or synthetic voice both rated as a category 2 level of distraction.

The research also separately assessed Apple’s Siri using the same metrics to measure a broader range of tasks; it generated a category 4 level of distraction—the highest level researchers have uncovered to date.

To put all of this year’s findings in context, last year’s research revealed that listening to the radio rated as a category 1 distraction; talking on a handheld or hands-free cell phone resulted in a category 2 distraction; and using an error-free speech-to-text system to listen to and compose e-mails or texts was a category 3 distraction.

## Facts are Known.....Showing 71%

Source: Final Wishes Interactive Resource

Almost three-quarters of adults under the age of 34 (**71 percent**) do not have a Will. If you died today, who would be responsible for making end-of-life arrangements? What would happen to your property, money and survivors? End-of-life discussions can be difficult and uncomfortable. Make sure you have up-to-date “Final Wishes”. Share and store information for your loved ones.

Contact our office for “End of Life” packet to assist in this endeavor.



### ***Savory Sweet Potato Fries***

2 small sweet potatoes            1/2 tsp chili powder  
1/2 tsp ground cumin            1/2 tsp onion powder  
1/2 tsp garlic powder            1/8 tsp salt (optional)  
1/8 tsp cayenne

Prepare oven to 400F. Lightly spray a baking sheet with cooking spray. Cut the sweet potatoes in strips about 4x 1/4 x 1/4 inches. Put the sweet potatoes in a medium bowl. In a small bowl, stir together the remaining ingredients. Sprinkle over the sweet potatoes. Stir gently to coat. Spread the sweet potatoes in a single layer on the baking sheet. Lightly spray the tops with cooking spray. Bake for 40 to 45 minutes or until brown on the outside and tender on the inside, turning once with a spatula halfway through.

**Nutrition Facts:** Calories 102—Total Fat 0g—  
Cholesterol 0mg—Sodium 139mg—Carbohydrates 24g—  
Fiber 4g—Sugar 5—Protein 2g.

### ***Corn Muffin Mix***

2 pkgs Corn Muffin Mix            2 TBS butter  
1 medium onion—chopped        4 eggs  
2 cups fresh or frozen broccoli (*thawed*) chopped  
1 cup cottage cheese            1/4 cup milk

Prepare oven to 350F. Grease a 13" x 9" pan. Melt margarine or butter in a skillet. Add onion; sauté until tender. Do not brown. In separate bowl, combine onions with remaining ingredients. Blend well. Pour into pan. Bake 40—45 minutes.

**Nutrition Facts:** Calories 160—Total Fat 4.5g—  
Cholesterol <5mg—Sodium 340mg—  
Carbohydrate 27g—Dietary Fiber <1g—  
Sugars 7g—Protein 2g

Give your best to the world, and the best will be given back to you.

#### **LaDell's Professional Schedule for December**

- Dec 2**            OHCE Christmas Party and  
Co Council Meeting  
10—1 p.m.. Italian  
Theme—bring a side dish or  
dessert. Bring toy  
unwrapped. LaDell;s  
house 1701 Boardwalk  
(*Perdido Key Addition*)
- Dec 6**            4-H Fall Food Festival  
11—2 p.m. Frink Chambers  
School. Need judges-please  
call Diann
- Dec 8**            Healthy Holiday Cooking  
Seminar, 7 p.m. Wellness  
Center (*Dining with Diabetes*)
- Dec 24**            OSU Ext Office closed noon  
12.24 and closed 25 & 26th  
Christmas Holiday.



**Hats off to a  
Merry  
Christmas**

*LaDell Emmons*

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