

12 Stocking Stuffers for Health Nuts

If your childhood Christmas experience was anything like mine, then perhaps you can recall digging through your stocking without a whole lot of holiday cheer.

The first thing I used to do on Christmas morning, after making sure Santa ate his cookies and drank his milk, was unhook my stocking and try as hard as I could to feign gladness and glee at the sight of new socks and underwear, country-western CDs, and pieces of fruit. However, looking back on it, I probably should have been more appreciative of the latter gift, considering that it reinforces my notion that stocking stuffers create a wonderful opportunity to give the gift of health and wellness to our loved ones.

I have nothing against folk music or undergarments, but why not throw in at least one of the 12 health-related items below into a stocking or two? Who knows—it could be the gift that the recipients light up about the most, or perhaps it will be what inspires them to start 2015 on the right fitness-focused foot!

Food and Drink

1. Vega Protein Smoothie: Being lactose intolerant, I steer clear of whey (a protein found in milk) protein, which is unfortunate considering whey makes excellent post-workout fuel. But I can honestly say that since finding and trying Vega, I don't miss my whey shakes one bit! Vega Protein boasts 15 grams of protein that come from whole food ingredients like kale, spinach, broccoli (one scoop equals two servings of veggies) papaya extract, brown rice, pea, hemp and SaviSeed. The blend is soy, dairy and gluten-free, and it comes in delicious flavors like chocolate (my favorite!), vanilla,

tropical and berry! **Price per single pack: \$, per pouch: \$**

2. Raw Revolution Bars: There is a plethora of bars on the market, and sad to say, most of them are heavily processed and filled with unhealthy ingredients, such as artificial flavors and sweeteners and GMOs. I personally love Raw Revolution because their bars are not only organic, but also mostly vegan and completely gluten-free, making them perfect for individuals with certain food allergies and sensitivities. The bars come in over a dozen flavors, my favorites being Spirulina Dream (made with cashews, dates, spirulina powder and agave nectar, just to name a few ingredients) and Chocolate Crave (which features organic cocoa and almonds).

Price: \$

3. Numi Tea: Who doesn't love a warm, comforting cup of tea during the holiday months? Tea is known for its amazing health benefits, from improving digestion to preventing certain diseases. But it turns out that some brands of tea can do more harm than good, brands that are laden with toxins, pesticides, artificial flavors and sweeteners, and GMOs (genetically modified organisms). I'm a fan of Numi Tea because it's an organic and non-GMO certified company, is fair trade certified, and helps supply clean drinking water to needy people around the globe. Last, but certainly not least, they offer dozens of delicious teas to suit any taste, like Carrot Curry and Chocolate Mint! **Price: \$**

4. Dark Chocolate: What's a stocking without a little something sweet to eat? The abundant research on the health properties of dark chocolate is music to a health nut's ears because it proves that eating chocolate can not only be OK, but beneficial! Dark chocolate is an outstanding source of antioxidants and has been proven to lower the risk of heart disease, improve cognitive function, lower blood pressure, and even provide UV protection for our skin! There are several excellent, organic varieties you could go with, such as Endangered Species, Sweetriot, Taza, and Giddy YoYo, but

whatever you choose, make sure the label doesn't say "processed with alkali," as this process diminishes the amount of healthy, naturally occurring flavanols of chocolate.

Kitchen

5. Gefu Spirelli Spiral Slicer: If you haven't noticed, julienned cucumbers and carrots and gluten-free, low-cal veggie noodles are all the rage! They're a fantastic, fun alternative to plain ol' roasted or steamed veggies and can almost convince you that you're really eating carb-heavy, processed pasta! To use the Spiral Slicer, you simply place a vegetable into the end of it and twist! It's made of stainless steel and plastic and is dishwasher safe! **Price: \$**

6. OXO Good Grips Apple Divider: I'm all about convenience and healthy snacks. Put those two things together, and you've got one must-have stocking stuffer. This product makes slicing an apple into perfectly sized wedges as easy as one smooth stroke. Then all you have to do is bag them up and carry them out the door on your way to work or school. You'll make vending machine stops a ghost of Christmas past! **Price: \$**

7. Microplane® Herb Mill: This little contraption makes prepping fragrant, tasty and healthy herbs a cinch! All you do is place herbs inside, twist the handle, then presto! The sharp scissoring blades have minced away, providing you with heaps of herbs to use for seasonings, sauces and salad dressings. **Price: \$**

8. Ninja Express Chopper: This small yet powerful beauty is at the top of my Christmas wish list this year! (I hope my husband is reading!) It evenly chops vegetables, minces garlic and herbs in seconds, purees like a dream (so I've heard), and it's BPA-free and dishwasher safe! **Price: \$**

Nifty Gadgets and Accessories

9. Tea Bag Buddy: Traveling tea drinkers, rejoice! The Tea Bag is a terrific on-the-go device that will keep you from dripping hot tea on yourself and your stuff. It's made of 100 percent pure silicone that helps insulate your cup to preserve the brewing temperature. Then, when your tea is ready, you simply pull the string, lift and turn, then squeeze your tea bag with zero mess! And it protects your fingers too! **Price: \$**

10. Sip n' Go (BPA-Free) Spill-Proof Collapsible Bottle: This lightweight, BPA-free, dishwasher safe, fits-in-your-pocket bottle is great for taking both to the gym or on hikes and long, leisurely strolls. Designed with a durable snap, it folds neatly and easily into a purse or pocket. What's more, it's freezable, so your drink stays cold. Another nice touch is that you can write your name on it so it doesn't get mixed up with anyone else's bottle. **Price: \$**

11. WristSTASH: This zippered pocket wristband handily stores your essentials, such as keys, money, and credit cards, as you run. I like it because it's comfortable, convenient, woven from soft recycled cotton terry, machine washable and comes in several cool colors and patterns. **Price: \$**

12. SKLZ Accupoint: This ergonomic, spine-friendly little tool was designed to relieve sore parts of your body through trigger release massage. I love it because it's compact, easy to store, easy to clean and has a super-cool double-ball shape that wonderfully cradles the spine. **Price: \$**

I hope these gift ideas have been helpful! I pray you and yours enjoy a healthy, happy and very Merry Christmas!

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