

Family & Consumer News

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Dear Consumers:

Spring is in the air, everything is starting to bloom. March brings National Nutrition Month and April is National Literacy Month, a time to sharpen your consumer skills in money management.

If you are interested in getting this newsletter through e-mail, call our office and give us your e-mail address.

Sincerely,



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DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS



It's National Nutrition Month which gives us the opportunity to review the USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These guidelines give us a practical map for eating by emphasizing a balance between food and physical activity. Eating right and being physically active are keys to a healthy lifestyle. With healthful habits, you may reduce your risk of many chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, and certain cancers, and increase your chances for a longer life. Here is a summary of the Dietary Guidelines.

Eat a Daily Variety From Every Food Group - The best way to get a balanced diet is to eat a variety of nutrient-packed foods every day. A healthy eating plan is one that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fat-free or low-fat milk products. Includes lean meats, poultry, fish beans eggs and nuts. Keep

foods that are low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt and added sugars.

To keep from getting bored, mix up your choices within each food group. There are so many different fruits and vegetables on the market. Try to include dark leafy greens, dark orange vegetables and a variety of beans and peas.

Balance Food and Physical Activity - Regular physical activity is important for your overall health. It also helps you control body weight by balancing the calories you take in with the calories you expend each day.

Can't get a walk in every day? Find small amounts of time; say 10 to 15 minutes to be active. Park your car away from the store and walk, take the stairs whenever you find them and walk for the last 10 minutes of your lunch hour.

Choose Nutritionally Dense Foods - Look at the calories on the label and compare them with what nutrients you

are also getting to decide whether the food is worth eating. When one serving of a single food item has over 400 calories per serving, it is high in calories.

Since sugar contributes calories with few, if any nutrients, look for foods and beverages low in added sugars. Read the ingredient list and make sure that added sugars are not one of the first ingredients. Some names for added sugars include sucrose, glucose, high fructose corn syrup, maple syrup, and fructose.

Pay attention to fats. – Choose foods that are low in saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol to help reduce the risk of heart disease. Most of the fats you eat should be polyunsaturated and

monounsaturated fats. Keep your total fat intake between 20% to 35% of calories.

Reduce Sodium - Research shows that eating less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium (about 1 teaspoon of salt) per day may reduce the risk of high blood pressure. Most of the sodium people eat comes from processed foods, not the saltshaker.

Play it Safe With Food – Be sure you know how to prepare, handle and store food safely to keep you and your family safe. Clean hands, food-contact surfaces, fruits and vegetables. To avoid spreading bacteria to other foods, meat and poultry **should not** be

washed or rinsed. Yes, you read it correctly. Research has shown that we tend to spread more bacteria over our sinks and counter tops as we wash raw meat and poultry. Unless you are in the habit of immediately washing and bleaching your surfaces, you set yourself up for a risky germ heavy work area. And, cooking will destroy the bacteria on food.

Separate raw, cooked and ready-to-eat foods. Cook meat, poultry and fish to safe internal temperatures to kill microorganisms. Chill perishable foods promptly and thaw foods properly.

Adapted from: USDA

SPRING CLEAN YOUR KITCHEN FOR SAFETY



All that moping and polishing might make your kitchen look clean, but real clean means getting rid of germs and bacteria that causes food borne illness. So, when you are busy doing your spring cleaning, be sure to tackle those invisible culprits lurking in your kitchen.

Harmful bacteria can grow easily on kitchen surfaces and in your refrigerator. Bacteria like salmonella, staphylococcus, E. coli and listeria are just some of the bacteria that may be hanging out in your kitchen. While you can't see or smell bacteria, they are everywhere and they especially like moist environments. A clean and dry kitchen helps protect you and your family from foodborne illness.

A truly clean kitchen relies on more than just looks, it also depends on keeping your kitchen clean. By following some key cleaning steps, you can help prevent bacteria from spreading throughout your kitchen.

- ◆ Always clean surfaces thoroughly with hot soapy water. Sanitize your kitchen countertops with diluted chlorine bleach. Use 1 teaspoon bleach to 1 quart of water. Be sure to dry with clean paper towels after each cleaning.
- ◆ Disinfect dishcloths often. Launder dishcloths frequently using the hot water cycle of the washing machine. Then be sure to dry them in the dryer. These items harbor bacteria and when wet, promote bacterial growth. Also, consider using paper towels to clean up kitchen

surfaces. When done, throw the towel away.

- ◆ Rid your refrigerator of spills, bacteria, mold and mildew. Clean your refrigerator weekly to kill germs that could contaminate foods. To tackle bacteria, mold and mildew, clean interior refrigerator surfaces with hot soapy water. Rinse with damp cloth, dry.
- ◆ Clean your kitchen sink drain and disposal once or twice a week by pouring a solution of 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach in 1 quart of water down the drain. Food particles get trapped in the drain and disposal, creating the perfect environment for bacterial growth.

Source: Fight BAC, USDA

FINANCIAL LITERACY IS CRITICAL



April is Financial Literacy Month.

Established in 2006, it is designed to focus attention on the need for awareness and education, consumers need to improve financial skills to better manage their personal finances. Literacy means knowledge and with the down turn in our economy it is imperative that we sharpen our skills to get the most for our money. Through education, we can improve spending and saving habits while increasing participation and contribution levels to retirement plans.

Whether you are entering the workforce or ready for retirement, planning for the future is critical.

Throughout our life time, we are faced with many decisions on how we spend and use our money. It doesn't matter how much you make, it matters how you plan and direct your money. Many people do well with a modest income, while some high wage earners tend to spend all they make.

Financial literacy needs to start early in a child's life. Early decisions about how to spend an allowance gives a child practice in decision making skills. Parents can help kids practice the concepts of planned spending and saving for a future purchase.

A parent once told me her son wanted an expensive pair of athletic

shoes. Her response to his request was that she would not spend that kind of money and the only way he would get the shoes would be if he earned the money himself. Guess what? He started mowing for several neighbors that summer and earned more than enough money to make the purchase and then took very good care of the shoes. The lesson after he earned enough money was to shop around for the best buy.

Learn all you can about managing money and making sound financial decisions. Extension has fact sheets and recordkeeping ideas to help you get organized and headed down the path of financial stability.

GETTING THROUGH TOUGH TIMES



During these days of recession and economic down turn, it becomes important for families to practice sound money management skills. Many people are experiencing a reduction in hours at work which means you aren't bringing home as much income.

According to the University of Illinois Extension, many families do not adjust their lifestyle for six months or so after they experience a drop in income. The sooner you take charge of your financial situation, the better off you will be.

Here are some research based strategies:

- ◆ Make a list of the family's most

important expenses while you have less income. This means things you must have or do. Make a family spending plan by listing the amount you will spend in each category.

- ◆ Spend according to you plan. With less income, each spending decision is critical. Tally up your expenses each week to make sure you are not over spending in any category.

Wise Spending

- ◆ Shop local farmer's roadside stands and u-picks, and prepare and prepare meals at home to save money.
- ◆ Consider needs vs. wants – ask

yourself did you really need a daily latte, premium cable, or a weekly manicure.

- ◆ Go to the local beauty/ barber schools to get less expensive grooming treatments.
- ◆ Visit your local library to check out movies and books and read current magazines.
- ◆ Purchase prepaid phones to keep your family in touch and save on cell phone bills.
- ◆ Delay purchases – when you want to buy something wait one week to see if you still think the purchase is really necessary.

Source: University of Illinois Extension

BRINGING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN



National Week of the Young Child reminds us to recommit ourselves to ensuring that each and every child experiences the type of early

environment – at home, at child care, at school, and in the community – that will promote their early learning.

Research shows the early years are crucial to brain development in children. A child's early experience

shape and mold the brain which impact learning throughout the lifetime. The National Association for the Education of Young Children designate the week of April 19th to celebrate young

children, and those who help children make the most of their early years.

Early childhood educators want to encourage parents, teachers, policymakers, and community leaders to support young children and the programs that provide them opportunity to learn and grow. This week is a good time to start spending more time with the children in your life – parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and all extended family members can make an effort to spend time with the children in your family.

Look at the activity list and change your routines to include one or two:

- ✓ Read a book to your child each night. Cut off the television and read a story, make it part of a bedtime routine for young children. Let school age children read a short story to you or read a chapter or two of a book until it is finished.
- ✓ Plant a garden. This is a good time to plant a flower or vegetable garden; it gives your family a project to work on for several months.
- ✓ An idea that is quickly becoming a memory of another time --- cook dinner together. Divide the tasks and each family member can do their part. Even very small children can help set the table or tear lettuce for a

salad. Then sit down and enjoy the food and conversation.

- ✓ Get out in the back yard and play a game. Kick ball, volley ball, or just toss a ball back and forth. It is great physical activity for the whole family and a good way to relieve stress.

I'm sure you can add to this list of things to do with young children. You don't need to spend a lot of money entertaining children, just give your time, wisdom and love. For more information and fact sheets on child development, contact the Madison County Extension office.

Adapted from NAEYC

REPLACE STRESS WITH PEACE



If you have ever taken a plane trip, you may recall the instructions you were given as to handling your oxygen mask in the event of an

emergency. Adults are clearly told to put their oxygen mask on first and then help your child.

This practice would seem contrary to what we would instinctively do, but the simple truth is, you would be of no help to your child if you passed out from lack of oxygen. You must take care of yourself first before you can ever take care of your child.

The same principle applies to everyday life. It is important that you find ways to cope with stress, because you can't be an effective parent if you suffering from burnout.

Identify Your Stress

Every person has bad days. Think of the things that make you feel stressed. List as many things that cause you stress as you can, especially the ones that bother you most. Make your list as complete as you can.

Identify What Stress Does To You

Everyone reacts differently to stress. When it builds up, it can result in anger, headaches, discouragement, depression, stomach-aches, feeling of helplessness, self-hate and other destructive feelings.

Often people have a feeling of helplessness that comes when you feel there is nothing you can do to fix things. When we feel helpless, we may stop trying to solve problems.

Deal With Stress

There are things you can do to deal with stress. What do you enjoy doing? Making a list of 20 things you love to do. Do you take the time in your life to do the things you love? Filling your life with things you love is a first step toward dealing with stress.

Suggestions for dealing with stress:

1. Recognize the things that bother you. Becoming aware of your stresses is a first step to dealing with them. It also is part of showing respect for your own feelings.
2. Recognize that you may not be able to fix everything at once, but there are things you can do that will help. Maybe they are little

things. But they make a difference.

3. Decide which stressors you can't change and stop dwelling on them.
4. Get outside yourself. Volunteer for a church or community group. Sometimes helping others can bring peace.
5. Give yourself vacations from stress. Sometimes we feel so worn-out or frustrated that we want to cry or scream; it's a good time for a mental vacation. Find a place to be alone, relax and breathe slowly and deeply. Imagine being in a favorite spot and doing something you enjoy.
6. Use your sense of humor.
7. Keep yourself strong. Eat a balanced diet and exercise several times a week.
8. Draw strength from friends and family members. Talk to someone who will listen to you, empathizes and help you get a prospective.
9. Focus on things you love to do.
10. Be a friend to yourself. Don't expect perfection, treat yourself with respect and don't compare yourself to others.

Adapted from: Alabama Extension