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Smart Choices for YOUNG FAMILIES

March

A Newsletter from the EFNEP/SCNEP Programs of Virginia Cooperative Extension



Welcome to the March Issue of **Smart Choices for YOUNG FAMILIES**. By now you may be weary of the winter weather and looking forward to spring. Hooray, **the first day of spring is March 20!** If bad weather has interfered with your outside physical activity, now is a good time to get going again. Perhaps **gardening** will be just what you need. This issue talks about the great benefits of gardening. You will also find some information about the importance of **family mealtime** and tips on things you can do if you have an **overweight child**. There also are tips on **saving money** at the grocery store and **food safety** in the grocery store that we can all use.



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Nutrition and Health Tips for Today

Benefits of family mealtime. Eating together as a family is important for several reasons. It allows for “togetherness,” improving the emotional health of family members. It has been said that families that do NOT eat together are just roommates. Research has shown that children do better in school and are less likely to use drugs if the family eats at least one meal together each day.

Family mealtime offers a time for parents to set an example of healthy eating by serving healthy, tasty foods. Use *MyPyramid* as your guide for fixing balanced meals and snacks. Plan menus for a week at a time. Choose some foods for each meal that children like, but have one new or less-liked food for them to learn to like. Parents are responsible for what and when children eat. Children should be allowed to decide “how much” to eat. Snacks should be avoided for 1 to 2 hours before a meal to insure that children are hungry.

Let children serve themselves so they will feel they have some control. Forcing children to “clean their plates” is NOT a good way to teach good eating habits. Neither is pushing children to limit how much they eat. In fact, this can lead to eating disorders. Children’s appetites vary with their height and weight and how fast

they are growing. A small, slow growing child will have a smaller appetite. So let the child decide how much to eat and he/she will eat enough.

Family talk at mealtime should be pleasant. Don’t allow arguing and criticizing. Don’t use mealtime to punish children for bad behavior done at other times. It is a good time to share events of the day and make plans for family activities. All members need to listen as well as talk. Parents should be good role models and show respect and good manners. Children learn by watching adults.



Staying Healthy for a Lifetime

Helping the overweight child. More and more children and teens are becoming overweight. Excess body fat in childhood sets the stage for the later onset of diabetes, high blood pressure, and other diseases. Also, overweight children are often teased. This can lead to low self-esteem and unhappiness.

If you have an overweight child, do NOT put him/her on a strict weight-loss diet, unless advised and supervised by a doctor. Instead, the goal should be to keep the child from gaining more weight or to slow weight gain. This will allow him/her to grow out of being overweight as height increases.

Eating healthy foods and limiting high-fat, high-sugar foods is a must for stopping the gain in body fat. Encourage children to eat more fruits, vegetables, low-fat milk products, and whole grains. Also, keep high-fat, high-calorie chips, cookies, candy, cake, and regular soft drinks out of your house.

Teach children what to choose when away from home. Encourage them to eat more vegetables and fruits and drink low-fat milk and water – not sugared soft drinks. Also, teach children to limit portion sizes and not to order super sizes in restaurants.

Another must for avoiding overweight is to get adequate physical activity. Adults need at least 30 minutes and children need at least 60 minutes of moderately vigorous activity on most days of the week. Limit the time children are allowed to watch TV or play computer games. Make time for the family to be active together, such as walking, hiking, or going to a nearby playground or park.

Remember, you will help the overweight child most by seeing that the whole family eats healthy meals and is physically active. Adults must be good role models. The overweight child cannot do it alone. **The reward will be healthy, happy children who do better in school.**

Staying Fit and Having Fun

Spring into a healthier you. With spring just around the corner, gardening is an ideal way to become physically active. Gardening is enjoyable and gives many health benefits. It uses all the major muscle groups: legs, buttocks, shoulders, stomach, arms, neck, and back.

Gardening also burns lots of calories and gives the same benefits as using exercise machines. Did you know that 45 minutes of gardening burns as many calories as 30 minutes of aerobics? Raking is like using a rowing machine. Mowing grass is similar to walking on a treadmill. Using shovels, rakes, lawn mowers, wheelbarrows, and hoes works the same muscles as many exercise machines.

Health experts say that adults need to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day. Physical activity lowers blood pressure, cholesterol, and stress. It helps to prevent chronic diseases and may help you live longer. Gardening is a great way to get these benefits.

Children's Corner

The truth about juices. Many parents think that fruit juice is the best drink for young children, but this is not always true. Sometimes, when given too much, juice can replace other important foods and drinks. Here are "juice" tips to keep in mind:

- Don't give fruit juice to an infant younger than 12 months of age for as long as they are breastfed or given formula. They don't need it.
- Give juice only from a cup and as part of a meal or snack. Do not let a child carry fruit juice in a sippy cup. Children may drink too much that way and also have a higher risk of cavities.
- Add a little water to the juice for infants and very young children. Fruit juice has acid and sugar that, in some cases, may cause diarrhea.
- Prevent tooth decay. Don't place an infant in a crib at bedtime with a bottle of juice, or milk either, as this causes ear infections and cavities in baby teeth.
- Limit the amount of juice that children and teens drink each day: Give no more than 4 to 6 ounces to 1- to 6-year-olds. Give no more than 8 to 12 ounces to children above 6 years old and teens.
- Choose only 100% fruit juice. Fruit-flavored drinks contain a lot of extra sweetener and give little nutrient value.

If you are worried about fruit juice, consider offering child-friendly fruit like applesauce and bananas instead. The process of making juice removes the fiber, so the whole fruit is a healthier choice.

Here are tips for making the most of gardening:

- Do gardening tasks by starting slowly and adding a little more activity each day.
- Vary your activities and don't devote all your time to strenuous tasks. Break up the harder tasks with easier ones. For example, shovel or dig for a few minutes, then weed for a few minutes.
- Keep track of the minutes. Aim for 30 minutes of gardening each day.
- Pay attention to your muscles and don't overdo it! Getting really sore will be discouraging.

Do you believe that staying healthy and fit costs too much money? If so, think again. Being out of shape and unhealthy will cost a lot more. Many activities like gardening do not cost a lot. Gardening not only improves health, but can give benefits such as a nice yard, beautiful flowers, and fresh vegetables. There is no better physical activity than gardening, so get up and get going!



For more information on juices, go to <http://www.aap.org/policy/re0047.html>.

Teenagers and harmful ads. Ads appealing to teenagers are everywhere – in magazines, on the Internet, on television, and at the movies. Most ads are designed to get teens to buy something. Many of the messages entice teens to buy products or do things that are unhealthy. These ads may lead teens to believe that they have to be thin to be beautiful, good looking, happy, and cool. Some teens may come to see themselves as too fat even when they are not. These ads may also cause poor self-esteem. As a result, many teens go on unhealthy diets or do other harmful things to lose weight and feel good about themselves.

Ways adults can fight against the harmful effects of these ads:

- Listen to teens' concerns and let them know you recognize the pressure to be thin.
- Remind teens that lasting beauty comes from within.
- Remind them often of their good qualities such as good character, dependability, being responsible, being a hard worker, etc.
- Encourage teens to be physically active – at least 60 minutes a day.
- Be a positive role model by eating healthy foods and being physically active yourself.

Saving Money at the Grocery Store

What's best – fresh, frozen, or canned? Most vegetables, fruits, and meats are available in the grocery store as fresh, frozen, or canned. You may wonder which form is the best buy. This depends on several factors. Below are some things to compare.

Cost and number of servings. Compare cost of fresh, frozen, and canned fruits, vegetables, and meats based on cost per ready-to-eat serving. With canned and frozen items, there is little waste, except when the canned item has a lot of water. So check the label for number and size of servings. For fresh vegetables and meats, the best guide is your experience in cooking them and seeing the number of servings you get from a certain amount of raw food.

Fresh vegetables and fruits are at their best price and flavor when in season. To get information on foods in season and servings per pound, call this toll-free number: (888) 814-7627.

Shelf life. If you have trouble with letting food spoil, canned or frozen vegetables, fruits, and meats may be a better choice.

Nutrient value. There is usually little difference in the nutrient value of fresh, frozen, and canned vegetables, fruits, and meats. The exception is that canned foods may have more salt. Also, canned fruits may have more sugar. To compare the nutrient value of different forms, check the Nutrition Label.

Fresh produce that's in season and that has been harvested for only a short time will contain the most nutrients. But this is only true if they are really fresh. If they have been in transit, in storage, or in the grocery store for a long time, nutrient content will be reduced. Keeping fresh vegetables in your home for a long time will also result in nutrient loss. So buy only what you can use in a few days.

Equipment and time to prepare. Canned and frozen foods may be the best choice if you have limited time and equipment for cooking.

How food will be used. Some lower-cost canned or frozen vegetables and fruits may be of lower quality in regard to appearance. However, they may work fine in mixed dishes.

Keeping Food Safe

Food safety at the grocery store. The prevention of food poisoning starts in the grocery store. Here are some steps you can take to keep the food you buy safe and of good quality until you take it home.

Buy only at grocery stores with good food-safety practices. Restrooms should be clean and in order. Hot water, soap, and towels should be available for workers and customers to wash their hands. There should be signs on the walls telling employees to wash their hands after using the bathroom and after handling raw meat. Out-of-date foods should be removed from shelves. Fresh produce should be clean and in clean bins or packages.

Shop for groceries in a safe order. Put packaged and canned foods in the cart first. Put fresh meat, poultry, milk, eggs, and frozen foods in the cart last. If doing other errands, buy groceries last. In the summer, take along an ice cooler for perishable foods if your trip home will take more than 30 minutes.

Choosing foods safely.

Don't buy cans that are dented, bulging, cracked, or that have loose lids. Choose fresh produce free of bruises and rotten spots. Buy only pasteurized milk, cheese, cider, and juices. Check to make sure eggs are clean, uncracked, and are not out of date. Don't buy frozen foods that have thawed. Don't buy any packaged food that has been opened.



Avoid cross contamination. Keep fresh meats, poultry, and seafood separate from other foods by putting them in plastic bags. At the check out counter, make sure that raw meat is bagged separately from other foods.

Check the "Sell-by" or "Use-by" dates. The "Sell-by" date tells how long the product should be left on the grocery store shelf. Foods can be used for only 2 to 4 days after the "Sell-by" date. The "Use-by" date tells the last date that the food is at peak quality and safety. Don't buy foods for which this date has expired.

March Word Puzzle Answers:

COMPARE COST
NUTRITION LABEL
CROSS CONTAMINATION
TOOTH DECAY
FRUIT JUICE
EXPIRED
FAMILY MEALTIME
OVERWEIGHT
LOW SELF-ESTEEM
Final Answer: ENCOURAGE

**For more information on food, nutrition,
and achieving a healthy weight, contact:**

Or call this toll-free number: 1-888-814-7627

If you have access to the Internet, go to these sites:

Healthy Futures Series: <http://www.ext.vt.edu/healthyfutures>
MyPyramid Food Guide: <http://www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/index.html>
Food Stamps in Virginia: <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/benefit/foodstamp.html>

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The Food Stamp Program provides nutrition assistance to people with low incomes. It can help you buy nutritious foods for healthy eating. To learn how to apply, call your local county or city **Department of Social Services** (listed under city/county government in phone book). For help in finding the correct local number, call this toll-free number: **1-800-552-3431** (M-F 8:15-5:00, except holidays). By calling the local DSS office, you can get other useful information about services you may need.

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