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Smart Choices for YOUNG FAMILIES

December

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

Welcome to the December Issue of **Smart Choices for YOUNG FAMILIES**. December brings the major holidays of Christmas, Kwanza, and Hanukkah, when we spend more time with family and friends. This can be fun and exciting, but it may bring more stress and make your life hectic. Worry about weight gain may also take away some of your enjoyment. Rich holiday foods, lots of parties, and big meals make healthy eating and preventing weight gain major challenges. This issue has many tips to help you reach New Year's Day, without feeling fat, worn out, and stressed.



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Nutrition and Health Tips for Today

Have a guilt-free, gain-free holiday. Enjoy the holidays without gaining weight! Does this sound too good to be true? Here are some tips for helping you arrive at New Year's Day without guilt or weight gain.

1. Early each day, plan **what** you will eat and **how much**. Make it realistic – don't set yourself up for failure.
2. Plan to include at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day. This will boost your energy, relieve stress, and help curb cravings for food.
3. Write brief notes of your plans. This can help you avoid giving into temptation.
4. Tips for sticking to your eating plan:
 - Keep snack bags with fruits and vegetables in your refrigerator. These can help curb your hunger without adding a lot of calories.

- Don't try to "save up" your calories so that you can eat more at an evening party. Instead, eat and drink healthfully all day so that you don't over-do at the party.
- Take a low-calorie food item to a covered-dish event, such as a fruit or vegetable salad with little or no dressing.
- Drink lots of water or other no-calorie drinks during the day and at the event.
- Eat slowly and enjoy every bite.
- Restaurant servings are usually too big. You may want to split the meal with a friend, OR place half the meal in a take-out box before eating.

5. Tips for sticking to your physical activity plan:

- Wear comfortable walking shoes when running errands.
- Park further away from the store so you can get in some extra walking.
- Walk rapidly around the store or mall before shopping.
- Take the stairs instead of the escalator or elevator.
- Spend time with family and friends while walking or doing something active.

Staying Healthy for a Lifetime

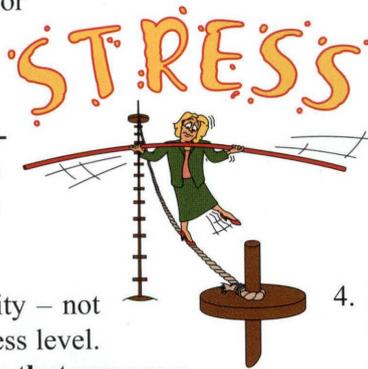
Stress and your health. Do you feel you have a lot of stress – especially during the holidays? Almost everyone admits to having too much. But what is stress and how does it affect our health and well-being?

Most mental health experts define stress in these ways:

1. Stress is our **physical and emotional response** to factors or events that place a demand on us for adjustment.
2. Stress occurs when there is an **imbalance** between demands and our "**perceived ability**" to cope. We have more stress when we think we cannot cope with the demands or problems we face.

Remember, it is our **belief** about our ability – not our actual ability – that determines our stress level. If you have a **good self-concept** and **believe that you are a capable person**, you will be less stressed. This will enable you to cope better with life's challenges. High stress may lead you to suffer one or more of these:

- Fast heartbeat and increased blood pressure
- Increased blood sugar, leading to poor control of diabetes
- Anger, depression, hopelessness, and being irritable
- Difficulty going to sleep and/or staying asleep
- Forgetting, losing things, or not thinking clearly



- Tense muscles, headache, backache, or joint ache
- Heartburn, stomach upset, or spasms in bowels.

Here are some things that may help you reduce stress:

1. Change your situation – if you can. For example, if being around negative people is causing you stress, limit your time with them.
2. Keep in mind that you may not be able to change what people **say to you**, but you **CAN change how it affects you**.
3. If you have low self-esteem, seek help from a professional counselor, minister, or friend.
4. Let humor raise your spirits. Read joke books or watch comedy on TV. Don't take yourself too seriously. Forgive yourself for past mistakes and failures.
5. Get adequate exercise and practice relaxation techniques such as breathing deeply.
6. Eat balanced meals and nutritious snacks, and don't over-indulge on high-calorie, high-fat foods (chips, candy, cookies, etc.). Poor eating habits can lead to a vicious cycle of weight gain or loss and poor health. This will lead to even more stress.

Staying Fit and Having Fun

Fitness flashback. With the beginning of a new year fast approaching, it is a good time to review your fitness habits. How did you do on getting enough physical activity or losing weight? If you did not do well, don't give up. Just get back on track and set a fresh goal for the new year.

Tips on achieving fitness goals:

1. An important first step is to make the decision to be active and write it down. Be honest with yourself about what you really plan to do.
2. Choose a physical activity that you will enjoy and that fits your routine. Health experts recommend 30 minutes of moderately vigorous activity, on most days of the week. Set aside a specific time each day to do this. You can break it up into 10- to 15-minute sessions.
3. Try to do the activity every day, but if you miss a day, don't give up! Start again the next day.
4. Don't make excuses. You can exercise at home by dancing or moving to music. Try using two cans of soup as weights or a pair of old pantyhose as a stretch band to tone and shape your arms.
5. If you like being outdoors, walk several times a day around your neighborhood. Use it as a time to socialize by inviting neighbors to walk with you.

6. If you feel you don't have extra time for exercising, add more activity to your daily routine. Take the stairs, not the elevator. Park further away from the office, mall, or other places. The extra walking will burn lots of calories.
7. Swimming is a wonderful exercise! It strengthens your muscles, increases energy, burns calories and doesn't place stress on joints.
8. Remember, any amount of physical activity is better than none. Make it a regular part of your life and you will enjoy great health benefits.



Saving Money at the Grocery Store

Convenience foods vs. homemade. Do you often buy convenience foods for your family? A "convenience food" is an item that requires little or no work to prepare or contains all ingredients for a dish or meal. Whether or not these are a smart buy depends on family stage and the cost and nutrient content of the item compared with homemade. A convenience food may be a good choice if the homemade version takes a long time to make and you are a busy parent, holding down a full-time job.

What about nutrient content? Many convenience foods have a nutrient content similar to homemade, but may be higher in salt, fat, sugar, and calories. To determine this, look at the nutrition facts label. If the food gives more than 3 g total fat or 200 mg sodium, it could be viewed as a high-fat or high-sodium food, especially if it is one item in a meal. If the convenience item is a complete meal, it might be okay if it contains 18 g fat or 600 mg sodium. This would be 1/4 of the daily allowances for adults needing 2,000 calories.

Also, check the label and choose convenience foods that give the most vitamins and minerals. To learn more about this, contact the EFNEP or SCNEP program assistant, listed on the back of this newsletter or call (888) 814-7627.

What about cost? A general rule is "the more table-ready – the higher the price of a food." Buying convenience foods increases grocery costs and will not fit into a food-stamp allotment. The best plan is to prepare most foods from scratch. Here are some convenience foods that are similar in cost and nutrition to the homemade version:

- canned and frozen fruits and vegetables
- cakes, cookies, and other dessert mixes
- macaroni and cheese
- canned spaghetti, pizza, and tomato sauce and salad dressings
- some TV dinners (may be low in amounts of fruits and vegetables)

Children's Corner

Make the holidays healthy for your family. All of the December holidays (Christmas, Kwanza, and Hanukkah) share the tradition of gift giving and having meals with family and friends. Let your children help in making simple cookies or snack mixes that can be used as gifts or for serving guests.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- Make time for regular, healthy meals. By doing this, you and your children won't be tempted to over indulge on high-calorie, high-fat snacks and sweets.
- Instead of high-sugar, high-calorie pies (chess, pecan, and fudge), make or buy pumpkin or sweet potato pies. These have less fat and sugar and higher amounts of vitamins and minerals. Pies can also be made without crust.



- Get children involved in making healthy snacks. Mix together cereal, dried fruits, and nuts. Put in paper muffin liners (see Reindeer Chow in Cooking Corner). Wrap in plastic wrap and tie with red and green ribbons.
- Use applesauce in place of half the oil or fat in cake, cookie, and muffin recipes.
- Instead of making high-fat, high-sugar cookies, make cinnamon crisp. Roll canned biscuit dough very thin, cut with a cookie cutter and sprinkle lightly with cinnamon and sugar. Let rise and bake at 375° until golden brown.

Keeping Food Safe to Eat

Make food gifts safe to eat. Have you been thinking of giving food gifts this holiday? Homemade foods may help loved ones living away to feel close to friends or family. If planning to ship/mail food gifts, observe these cautions:



- Dried forms of soup, drinks, fruits, salad dressings, seasoning mixes, and sauces, as well as nuts and dried beans, are safe to mail. Bacteria cannot grow since moisture is very low.
- Hard candies and dense sweets are safe because a high sugar level prevents growth of bacteria.
- **Safe shipping containers** include metal cans, plastic bags, and other non-breakable containers. Check to insure that cans are not dented or swollen. If so, throw them out. Do not mail glass jars of food.
- Dense or dry baked goods are good choices since they are not likely to mold. Place baked goods in airtight containers. When mailing cookies and homemade candies, wrap each piece separately. Pack in popcorn or packing foam and place in a sturdy box.

Mailing of perishable foods should be done with extreme care, or only by professionals:

- Foods must be packed with a "cold source" and inside a Styrofoam or heavy cardboard box and taped well.
- They should be shipped overnight by UPS, FedEx, or Express Mail.
- Let the recipient know a food gift is on the way, so they will open it immediately.
- If you receive a package marked "Keep Refrigerated," open immediately. Check to see if it is still frozen or contains ice crystals. **If it doesn't – do not eat it.** Notify the person or company that sent it that it was no longer frozen.

Safety tips on other holiday foods:

- Do not eat or taste uncooked dough or cake batter that contains raw eggs.
- If making eggnog, use pasteurized eggs, not raw eggs.
- If using apple cider, use only pasteurized. Unpasteurized cider may contain harmful bacteria unless boiled.

December Word Search

Find the word that fits the blank in each sentence below; then find and circle the word. Words can go up, down, across, or sideways.

S U O I T I R T U N E E S W F
 E S J P O B Z T C C N T T P P
 C L K M K Q S C U E I F R K Z
 Y N W Z A X R A R S P A E Z E
 J L U A X C S G Z L H T S R S
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 K X R P L I N C R E A S E S B
 S N K P Z D O U R Q M Q N M A
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 G N Q V C I K E M L V A T D E
 F D A I L Y N O G P R L Q M D
 Z X J C H I G H E R U S U V E

1. We have more _____ when we think we cannot cope with the problems we face.
2. At least 30 minutes of physical activity each day will boost your _____.
3. Add more physical activity to your _____ routine by taking the stairs and walking extra steps.
4. Physical activity and eating _____ meals may help you to reduce stress.
5. Convenience foods may be _____ in salt, fat, sugar, and calories than homemade foods.
6. Frequently buying convenience foods greatly _____ grocery costs.
7. Eat balanced meals and _____ snacks when under stress.
8. _____ can be used instead of half of the oil or fat in cake, cookie, and muffin recipes.
9. Do not eat or taste uncooked dough that contains _____ eggs and use only pasteurized apple cider.

Wishing you and your family a healthy, happy holiday and blessed new year!

Cooking Corner

Whole-Wheat Cranberry Orange Bread

(great for gift giving)

Ingredients:

- 1-1/2 cups of fresh cranberries (now in season; found in fresh produce section)
- 1/2 cup of honey
- 2 large oranges
- 2 eggs
- 4 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 cup whole-wheat flour
- 1/2 cup of self-rising flour
- 1 tablespoon of baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon of baking soda
- 1/2 cup coarsely chopped walnuts

Directions:

1. Place cranberries in a large bowl and chop finely. Stir in honey and set aside 1 hour.
2. Preheat oven to 350°. Apply a light coat of cooking spray to one 9 x 5 x 3-inch loaf pan.
3. Wash two oranges, dry well and grate the rind into a small bowl (need 3 tablespoons grated rind).
4. Peel away white portion of the oranges, just beneath the rind, and then coarsely chop the orange sections.
5. Mix chopped oranges (with juice) into the cranberry-honey mixture.
6. Beat eggs with a fork, and then stir in the oil. Stir egg-oil mixture together with cranberry-orange mixture.
7. In large mixing bowl, combine the flours, baking powder, baking soda, chopped walnuts, and orange rind. Gently stir this mixture with a large spoon.
8. Add liquid ingredients to dry ingredients, and stir gently until well mixed.
9. Pour into the prepared loaf pan.
10. Bake for 50 to 60 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the middle of the loaf comes out clean.
11. Set hot loaf pan on a wire rack and cool for 10 minutes. Use a table knife to gently loosen sides of loaf from pan. Turn loaf onto wire rack and allow to cool completely.

Kids in the Kitchen: Reindeer Chow

(makes 6 to 8 1-cup servings)

Ingredients:

- 1 cup raisins
- 1 cup Craisins (dried cranberries, located next to the raisins in grocery store)
- 1 cup of roasted peanuts
- 1 cup of puffed wheat ready-to-eat cereal
- 1 cup of shredded mini wheat cereal
- 1 cup of mini pretzels
- 1 cup each of other ready-to-eat, low-sugar cereals or other dried fruits

Directions:

Combine all ingredients in a 1-gallon size Ziploc-type bag. Making sure that the bag is tightly sealed; shake the bag to mix well. Divide into 8 sandwich bags to make individuals servings.

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

December Word Search Answers:

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|-------------|---------------|
| 1. STRESS | 6. INCREASES |
| 2. ENERGY | 7. NUTRITIOUS |
| 3. DAILY | 8. APPLESAUCE |
| 4. BALANCED | 9. RAW |
| 5. HIGHER | |

**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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