

VISIONS

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY HEALTH SCIENCES

Your Family Health History—An Important Legacy

Maria C. Young, FCHS Educator, CEDH, Passaic County

“Knowing your family’s medical history can save your life” according to U.S. Surgeon General Carmona. If people are aware of their health risks, they can develop preventive strategies. Carmona has recommended that families focus on six chronic diseases: obesity, diabetes, cancer (colon, breast, colorectal) and osteoporosis. Research has demonstrated that lifestyle behaviors influence the onset of these conditions. If people know their family medical history, they will be able to take steps to safeguard their health by making positive lifestyle changes.

Knowledge of your family health history can help you:

- ✓ Watch for early warning signs.

- ✓ Get appropriate and more frequent screening tests.
- ✓ Collaborate with your medical provider to develop a personalized health plan.
- ✓ Evaluate your risk of passing certain conditions on to your children.
- ✓ Gain knowledge about the latest research and its implications for you and your family.

A family health history tree is a record of illnesses and deaths of blood relatives: parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Important dates are birth dates, ages when diseases were diagnosed, and date of death. Information on lifestyle patterns will be helpful. Descriptions of ethnic background, religion, education, occupation, and military service can be noted. To obtain a true picture of your family medical tree, it is suggested that information be collected for at least three generations. One way to record a family health history is to design a family tree called a “pedigree.” The chart below is an example of how to begin your family history.

continued on page 2.

Diabetes: Get the Facts Straight About the Sugar Factor



Karen Ensle EdD, RD, FADA, CFCS, FCHS Educator, Union County

Diabetes is a growing problem in the United States with over 11 million Americans diagnosed with this disease. Many advances in diagnosis and management of the disease allow individuals with diabetes to control it so that it does not lead to negative health effects. New types of insulin pumps, injection pens with removable and disposable lancets make it easier to manage blood sugar as compared to the old syringes that had to be sterilized after each use.

There are many myths associated with diabetes and we need to get the facts straight. Many people think that eating large quantities of sugar or sugary foods causes diabetes. This is NOT true! Diabetes is a condition of the body that involves an error in sugar and carbohydrate metabolism, but eating sugar does not cause a person to get diabetes. For instance, one of the main types of diabetes is called type 1 and it involves a faulty immune system. The most common form of diabetes is called type 2, and it is associated with obesity, physical

continued on page 5.

HIGHLIGHTS

After School Activities.....	3
Media Messages	4
Small Steps.....	6
Body Mass Index.....	6
Getting Families.....	7

Your Family Health...*continued from front page.***Family Medical History**

Name Birth Death

Brothers & Sisters

Mother Father

Brothers & Sisters Brothers & Sisters

To begin the process:

- Review your health record.
- Share your medical experiences with your parents and siblings.
- Make a list of your blood relatives; list any health conditions that you are aware of.
- Make it a sibling project. Ask open-ended questions.
- Communicate with your family the reasons why you believe that creating a family health history tree would be helpful. Seek their cooperation while maintaining sensitivity. Assure relatives that all of the information collected will remain confidential.
- Host a "This is Your Life" intergenerational video project during a family gathering. Have younger family members interview adults and video tape them. Examples of questions that can be used are: Whatever happened to Cousin Lou? When you were a child, what type of games did you play? What do you remember about your childhood illnesses? Are

you aware of any major health conditions that run in our family?

- Consider holding a family scrapbook party. This activity provides an opportunity to share photographs and memories. At the same time, collect information about health issues.

Red flags for potential health problems include:

- ✎ Any disease that occurs before age 50.
- ✎ Any disease in two or more generations.
- ✎ Several family members with the same disease.
- ✎ Different types of diseases (example, cancer) in the family.
- ✎ One person with different kinds of the same disease.
- ✎ Sudden death in someone who seemed healthy.

Your family's medical history is a useful tool. Take it to your doctor and discuss ways to individualize your health care. Share information with other family members. Update your records as new health issues emerge, at least once a year.

For more information, the following resources will be helpful:

- The Surgeon General's Family History Initiative "My Family Health Portrait." The software can be downloaded at www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/. A printed version of "My Family Health Portrait" can be obtained from the Federal Information Center at (888) 878-3256.
- The Mayo Clinic at www.mayoclinic.com has a family health history form that can be printed. Enter Family Medical History Form in the search tool.
- The Genetic Alliance at www.geneticalliance.org has a "Family History Tool."

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How After School Activities Build Safe and Healthy Kids

Marilou Rochford, MA, CFLE, FCHS Educator, Cape May County

Looking out for children's safety is essential to their good health and to parents' peace of mind. "Today, more than 28 million school-age children have parents who work outside the home. Up to as many as 15 million "latch key" children return to an empty home after school."¹ Those after-school hours, especially when children are alone and unsupervised, are a critical area of concern. Juvenile crime and unsafe activities (like drug, alcohol, and tobacco use) peak for youth in the hours between 2PM and 6PM. Juveniles are at the highest risk of being a victim of violence during that time. The risks are especially high between 3PM and 4PM, the first hour that most students are dismissed from school.²

How can we help families keep children safe? Experts agree that after school or extracurricular programs are a positive and healthy solution. After school programs help to reduce juvenile delinquency and protect children from violence. Involvement in such activities boosts a child's self esteem and builds worthwhile life skills such as communication and leadership. Youth with a strong sense of purpose, who are surrounded by a positive peer group, are better able to withstand negative peer pressure. According to state researchers Kristin Moore and Tamara Halle, "Involvement in at least one school club decreases the chances of a youth's engagement in risk-taking behaviors."

The most common benefits of involvement in after-school activities are that children:

- ✓ feel capable, talented and develop strong self-esteem
- ✓ discover abilities and interests
- ✓ have a chance to be with friends
- ✓ develop lifelong interests
- ✓ learn how to relax in a constructive way
- ✓ improve their school performance
- ✓ develop social, emotional, cognitive and physical skills
- ✓ learn to work effectively with peers and adults

There are many activities for parents and children to choose from. Some children favor sports or physical activities such as soccer, hiking, or dance. Other children benefit from art class, music lessons, or photography. Clubs that specialize in subjects of interest are also popular alternatives, i.e. computers, school newspaper, yearbook, or student government. Many programs and activities are free or low cost. Parents are encouraged to make sure that children are involved in choosing the activities that they enjoy.

Can children be involved in too many things? Parents should be sure not to "over-schedule" children. Too many activities cause stress for children and make them feel overwhelmed. After school activities should not interfere with studying or homework, nor should they interfere with a child's sleeping or mealtime routines. Balance is the key. Help children to choose an activity and use their after-school time to explore, discover, laugh, collaborate, and learn about themselves. Over-scheduling can cause anxiety for parents too, and undo the benefits of extracurricular events. Parents are encouraged to set a good

example by taking care not to over-schedule themselves.

With the help of parents, teachers, and other caring adults, children can benefit greatly from participating in after school activities. Just a few hours a week can mean the difference between children at risk and children who are happy, healthy, and safe.

¹ (from After School Programs: Keeping Children Safe and Smart report—see page 2 for benefits of a-s programs: safe, self esteem, academic performance; see page 5 for additional stats)

² (National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center: www.safeyouth.org/scripts/facts/afterschool.asp)



Making Sense of Media Messages About Medical & Health Treatment



Karen M. Ensle EdD, RD, FADA, CFCS, FCHS Educator, Union County

What sources of information about medicines and treatments can you trust besides what your doctor tells you? When your child is sick or hurt you need to know what the best treatment would be or what medicine to try. There are lots of advertisements, television commercials and ads that claim a product helps or heals. Many web sites also contain health information and may report the 'latest' studies showing treatments that work or those that don't. Sorting out all these messages, which affects your family's health, is not easy. Some sources can be trusted and others should be questioned. Here is some information on advertising, understanding good science, learning to question your sources, and using your computer as a source of health information.

The Business of Advertising

The business of advertising and selling medicines and medical treatment is very lucrative. Marketing terms are often used to get consumers to buy a product. Often the phrase "# 1 doctor recommended" is visible on the product label. Unfortunately, the product may only be recommended by a few doctors and it may not tell you when the product was actually evaluated. Was it 5 doctors or 500 doctors checking the product yesterday or ten years ago? Being a careful consumer is important.

Another term often used in advertising is the term "clinically shown," which means a product was tested on patients as part of a study to see if the product worked. Study results, however, depend on how the researchers conducted the study. If they followed strict scientific rules for doing the research, it may be meaningful. Many products however, include the "clinically proven" or "clinically shown" statements on the label, which actually may not be true.

When producing a medicine or a treatment, the original developer or researcher needs to have recorded that they were the first to develop the product or procedure. One way to do that is to apply for a "patent." A "patented" medical procedure or medicine does not guarantee safety or effectiveness of a treatment or product. If a product is "patented" it means that the maker of the product has proven to the federal government that he/she was the first to create the product. The government then issues a "patent" to the maker so that the maker can sell the product exclusively for a certain period of time. Patents do not mean a product is the best on the market, nor does it guarantee that the product is safe or it will work. It is always best for consumers to ask questions and to make sure the health information they are reading or hearing is reliable.

Following Good Science

Good research studies require careful planning and follow the principles of good science. Researchers follow specific procedures and processes so that their study is credible. Testing is conducted under carefully controlled conditions making sure all factors are controlled that might affect the study results. For example, if a researcher wanted to know how a medi-

cine affects a person, he/she needs to make sure that the person isn't taking any other medicines at the same time. Researchers also need to determine how many people should be included in the study to show an effect. The study group receiving the treatment needs to be compared to a "control" group to see if the treatment actually has an effect. A good study should be "replicated" or repeated again with a different set of people. That study should get the same results. It is then possible to trust the study outcomes when different studies come to the same conclusions. Well-done, scientifically sound studies should go through a "peer" review process. Other experts or "peers" review the study results and make sure the outcomes reflect that proper scientific standards were used.

Make sure your family knows the difference between studies that are confirmed findings as compared to "breakthrough findings." "Breakthrough findings" may seem promising but still need to be replicated and reviewed over time. A headline in a newspaper or on a website may attract your attention but remember, a "new study" is NOT a "proven study". "New" does not always imply "improved," whether it is a medicine, procedure, or practice.

Which Sources Can You Trust?

Sources of information that can be trusted include: accredited universities, medical schools, government agencies, professional medical, health science, and nutrition associations along with recognized disease related organizations such as the American Heart Association, American Diabetes Association, American Cancer Society, and the National Cancer Institute. Government agencies such as the Center

continued on page 5.

Making Sense...

continued from page 4.



for Disease Control, National Institutes of Health, and the Department of Health and Human Services are also reliable. Make sure you look at the information carefully and find out the background and expertise of the researcher, educator, or author. Do they hold training and credentials as a healthcare, public health, or medical professional? Are there conflicts of interest between the professional working for a company and the research they are conducting? Is the study being paid for by a company to support that company's products? Commercial support may bias or influence the study and the information the researcher shares with consumers.

Computer Internet Sites and Using the Web

The internet is a valuable source of medical and scientific information and advice but you can't trust everything you read. There are many websites that promote untested medical advice and health-related theories and opinions that have not been proven. You and your family need to begin your search for information with reliable, general sites and then expand from there. Web site addresses can tell you what type of organization or company set up the site. The last three letters in a web site indicate the source. Examples are:

.gov— a government web site.

.org—a non-profit organization web site that may contain useful information.

.edu—academic or education web site that will have fact sheets and other reliable resources.

.com—a commercial web site that is often designed to sell you something, not necessarily a source of reliable information.

As you evaluate new medical or health science information, question yourself on the safety of the treatment or medicine. Be suspicious if an advertisement or web site claims it is based on a "secret formula" or it is a "cure" for a major disease. Be suspicious of a treatment or medicine if it comes without directions for proper use and doesn't list content or ingredients and has no information about side effects. If the medicine or treatment claims it works for everyone and uses a testimonial about one person's experience, it should be questioned. Remember, if the research only discusses a single study as proof or cites a study without a comparison group, you know you should be careful of what you hear and believe. Evaluating new treatments and medicines takes some time on your part, but the end result will be to pick the correct treatment and proper medicine for improved health.

“It is always best for consumers to ask questions and to make sure the health information they are reading is reliable.”



Diabetes Facts...

continued from front page.

inactivity, stress, and a lifetime of poor eating habits, not just the consumption of sugary foods.

Another common thought and myth is that people with diabetes cannot eat sugar at all. This is also untrue. People with diabetes can eat all foods in moderation, even those high in carbohydrate. Ideally, carbohydrate intake, including sugar, needs to be monitored daily and spread through-

out the day for the best maintenance of blood sugar level since all types of carbohydrates can raise blood sugar. There is no scientific reason that sugar should be totally eliminated from the diet. It is true, however, that most Americans are overeating and choosing foods high in fat and sugar. All carbohydrate foods need to be watched carefully, especially the common sources such as soda, candy, sugary juice drinks, desserts and starchy foods such as breads, crackers, and snack foods. Most importantly, large portions need to be reduced in size for all foods. Moderation is the key to good blood glucose maintenance.

Many Americans believe if they eat a sugar-free diet they will delay the onset of diabetes or prevent it. Good lifestyle choices of eating balanced meals with whole grains, vegetables, fruits, lean protein, fat-free or low-fat dairy products, and small amounts of vegetable oils will help to keep blood sugar levels stable. Weight loss of as little as 5-10% of body weight may reduce the risk of diabetes. Exercise by itself has a positive effect on disease prevention, and together with a healthy diet, it will give the best protection possible.

For more information see: www.ndep.nih.gov/campaigns/tools.htm#psaPrint





Barbara O'Neill, Ph.D., CFP®, Specialist in Financial Resource Management

Many Americans are experiencing serious problems related to their health or personal finances or *both*. There are many similarities between both areas of life:

- \$ Problems generally develop slowly over time.
- \$ Many people expect quick fixes and are susceptible to fraud.
- \$ Lack of limits causes problems and restrictions (e.g., portion-controlled meals and automatic savings) help avoid them.
- \$ Drastic solutions, such as bankruptcy and gastric bypass surgery, have serious drawbacks.
- \$ Small changes, such as saving pocket change and cutting 100 calories a day, make a difference.

Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension is introducing a new program called *Small Steps to Health and Wealth™* (SSHWTM). The goal of SSHWTM is to encourage participants to set personal health and financial goals and implement behavior change strategies to achieve them. Participants can attend SSHWTM classes and/or register online to describe their goals, report progress, and receive motivational messages.

Below is a description of five of twenty-five SSHWTM behavior change strategies:

Small Steps to Health and Wealth™

1. Put Your Mind to It—Picture yourself achieving your goals and how good it will feel. State your goal without “weasel words.” For example, “I will save \$100 monthly” or “I can exercise 30 minutes daily” instead of “Hopefully, I will” or “I’ll try to.” Experts advise describing intended behavior changes in the present tense (e.g., “I quit smoking”). It makes people accountable because, otherwise, they are basically telling a lie. Likewise, speak of negative behaviors in the past tense (e.g., “I used to live paycheck to paycheck”).

2. Defy Someone or Defy The Odds—If others say you’ll never be able to change (e.g., lose weight, save money), defy them and prove them wrong. For added motivation, make a bet with a desired reward and time deadline. You can also use this strategy to “defy the odds” and not allow yourself to become a statistic such as “two-thirds of American adults are overweight or obese” and “the average U.S. household carries an \$8,000 credit card balance.”

3. Meet Yourself Halfway—If you want to improve your health and increase your wealth, downsize your eating and spending. Decrease the portion sizes of your favorite foods by half and do the same for “discretionary” expenses such as meals eaten away from home, clothing, and lottery tickets. Save at least half of all “windfalls” (e.g., tax refunds) or use them to repay debts.

4. Convert Consumption Into Labor—Figure out how much exercise is required to burn off a certain number of calories. If it takes two hours on a treadmill to work off a slice of apple pie, you might ask yourself if it is “worth the calories.” A comparable financial example is calculating how many hours of work are needed to purchase something.

5. Compare Yourself With Recommended Benchmarks—A frequently cited health benchmark, the body mass index (BMI), is based on a person’s height and weight and is used as an indicator of overweight and obesity. A financial benchmark is a person’s credit score, a three-digit number that can range from the 300s (lowest) to 800s (highest).

Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension will soon have a workbook available that lists all 25 SSHWTM behavior change strategies with a worksheet for each one for a personal analysis. Program participants are advised to select 3 or 4 behavior change strategies to adopt to improve their health and finances. For further information about SSHWTM, contact your local Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension office or visit www.rcrc.rutgers.edu/healthfinance.

Do You Know Your Body Mass Index?

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a number that helps you determine your weight status among adults. For adults over 20 years old, BMI falls into one of these categories:

BMI	Weight Status
Below 18.5	Underweight
18.5 – 24.9	Normal
25.0 – 29.9	Overweight
30.0 and Above	Obese



continued on page 8.



Getting Families to Eat Fruit & Veggies



**Karen Ensle EdD, RD, FADA,
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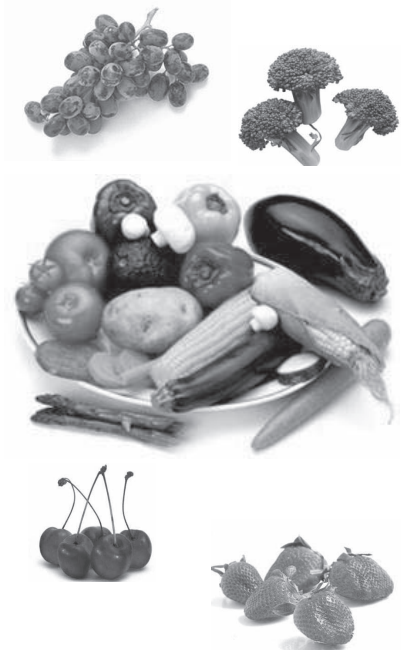
Motivating families and especially children to eat more vegetables and fruits is not easy. Research consistently reports that eating fruits and vegetables are important for good health. Fruits and vegetables help to reduce the risk for developing major diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes, among others. We also know that fruit and vegetable intake plays an important role in controlling weight gain, as produce is high in fiber, which makes us feel full. The problem is that Americans do not consume their minimum of five fruits and vegetables daily. The question is: "How can we successfully get families to consume more servings of fruits and vegetables daily?"

- * Offer a new fruit or vegetable at the beginning of the meal when the family is most hungry.
- * Keep the fridge or fruit bowl stocked with ready-to-eat fruits and vegetables that are easily accessible and in eyesight.
- * Try new combinations. Mix vegetables that are well-liked with others that are less popular.
- * Use a small amount of fat, sugar, salt, herbs, and other seasonings to make the healthy foods more appealing to family members.
- * Enjoy fruit smoothies. Blend yogurt, orange juice, and your favorite fruits for a tasty, and more importantly healthy, drink.
- * Prepare vegetables in new ways. Try a stir-fry or add more vegetables to prepared soup.

- * Top cereal, yogurt, waffles, and pancakes with fresh fruit.
- * Add vegetables like broccoli, mushrooms, and red pepper to pizza or add sautéed, minced veggies to spaghetti and pizza sauces, meat loaf, or pureed soups.
- * Make eating veggies and fruits fun and easy. Keep cherry tomatoes, cucumber slices, baby carrots, and celery sticks in 'snack grab bags.' Store next to low-fat dip or salsa on the same shelf in the refrigerator.
- * Enlist family members to help look through magazines for new vegetable and fruit recipes.
- * Try exotic or unfamiliar fruits and vegetables. You might find one you actually like!
- * Visit Farmers' Markets in your area and explore all types of Jersey Fresh produce. Visit "Pick-Your-Own" farms and enjoy a day picking your own fruits and vegetables with your family.
- * Grow a family vegetable garden and get everyone involved as a family project.
- * Have a positive attitude about the foods you eat. Parents need to be good role models for their children. Children need to see adults eating vegetables and fruit with encouraging comments such as: "This broccoli tastes great!" The family needs to be as excited about eating fruit and vegetables as they would about burgers and pizza.

So what if your family still turns up their nose at anything that looks like a vegetable or fruit? Don't give up. It may

take time before the family is willing to choose vegetables and fruits as the mainstay of their diet. It will also take continued reinforcement of understanding the health benefits of a balanced diet with plenty of colorful produce. We need to continue to offer vegetables and fruit at each meal and encourage family members to try them. Remember, keeping vegetables and fruits accessible will encourage consumption. The more we taste the "colors of the garden," the more we will eat them. Make the effort to increase your produce intake—your health is worth it!



Body Mass Index...*continued from page 6.*

As BMI increases, the risk for some disease increases. Some common conditions related to overweight and obesity include:

- Cardiovascular disease
- High blood pressure
- Osteoarthritis
- Some cancers
- Diabetes

It is important to remember that weight and BMI is only one factor that is related to disease. Whatever your BMI,

talk to your doctor to see if you are at an increased risk for disease. Physical activity and good nutrition are key factors in leading a healthy lifestyle and reducing risk for disease.

To figure your BMI use the following formula:

$$\text{BMI} = \left(\frac{\text{Weight in Pounds}}{(\text{Height in inches}) \times (\text{Height in inches})} \right) \times 703$$

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- Staying Healthy
- Raising Healthy Kids
- Eating Right
- Creating Healthy Environments

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