



Cooperative Extension

Get Moving—Get Healthy New Jersey



Practical Ways to Trim High Grocery Prices

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After nearly two decades of low food inflation, prices for staples such as bread, milk, eggs and flour are rising sharply, surging in the past year at double-digit rates, according to the Labor Department. Milk prices for example, increased 26 percent over the year while egg prices jumped 40 percent. The U. S. Department of Agriculture forecasts overall food prices will rise about 4 percent this year.

During these times of high food prices, you might be asking yourself “What can I do to save money?” A smart spending plan at the grocery store is one way to make ends meet. Families need to begin by creating a food budget. It just takes a little time and know-how to put into practice. Below are some specific money-saving ideas to consider:

- **Know How Much You are Spending-** When you spend \$60 at the supermarket one week and \$100 the next, you may not realize that your monthly grocery bill is one of your biggest expenses. Save your receipts and analyze them – you will be amazed at how much you spend on groceries and how much you can save by shopping more carefully. Take the time to create a food budget and follow it.
- **Plan for More Family Meals-** Plan ahead instead of stopping at fast food restaurants on the way home from work. Make meal planning a family affair. Write up a menu of the meals and snacks you plan to prepare for the week, while making sure they are affordable and fit your food budget. Start planning with your main meal and go from there.
- **Plan Every Shopping Outing-** Experts say that planning meals in advance and making detailed shopping lists can cut your grocery spending by 20 percent or more. Check your pantry before you go shopping to be sure of what you need. Review store flyers and build your list around what’s on sale and the best coupon deals. Buying in bulk, when possible, can often help save money in the long run.
- **Stick to Your List-** Grocery stores are designed to entice you to buy more with irresistible marketing. By sticking to a list, you will only purchase what you need and “get in and get out” of the store quickly.
- **Do Not Shop on an Empty Stomach-** If you go to a supermarket hungry, you will most likely purchase more food than you need, including expensive items as well.
- **Leave Young Kids at Home, if Possible-** Young children want all of the products that are marketed to them and conveniently placed at their “eye” level. Avoid potential in-store battles and try to shop alone.
- **Break Yourself of “Brand Habits”-** Generic or store brands are generally better buys. Basic commodities such as sugar, flour, tomato sauce, and paper towels are often indistinguishable when the label is removed. Some store brands are different from their national-brand equivalents, so buy small amounts first to test quality and flavor.
- **Go Easy on Highly Processed Foods in Expensive Packaging-** Buy the basics and add your own sugar, spices, condiments, and sauces. You’ll save 50 percent or more, and feel much more creative. The closer a food is to its natural state, the less it tends to cost.

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- **Do Not be Deceived by Packaging-** Check the per-unit cost of food products; sometimes small sizes are more economical than jumbo packs.
- **Beware of End Caps-** Food items on aisle "end caps" are often attractively displayed to entice shoppers to make additional purchases; these displays are not always a shopper's bargain.
- **Look Up, Look Down-** Items on the upper and lower shelves are often cheaper. Big brands often pay big bucks to have their products at eye level.
- **Cook Once, Eat Twice-** Plan meals with recipes that can be doubled easily. Serve one and label and freeze the other for a later date. Often it doesn't cost much more to make a double recipe. Use this same food for lunch to reduce spending excess dollars on your midday meal.
- **Buy Fruits and Vegetables in Season-** Eating in season is one key way to cut your food bill. Farmer's markets can offer savings on produce because you're buying locally and directly from the farmer.
- **Consider Eating Less Meat-** Prepare at least one or two meatless meals each week.
- **Cruise Through Your Fridge Daily-** Check foods on hand and plan to use them before they go bad.
- **Invest in a Good Inexpensive Cookbook-** With some new recipes, you can be more creative with the groceries you bring home. Look for healthy recipes that you can prepare in a short amount of time.
- **Watch the Cash Register-** Checkout errors can be costly. Use supermarket discount cards to save.
- **Stock Up on "Real" Bargains and Non-Perishable Foods-** For example, buy canned goods on sale.
- **Avoid Non-Nutritious Foods-** This includes "junk" food snacks, sugary foods, soft drinks, etc.
- **Do Not Pay Interest on Food Bought on Credit Cards-** This increases the cost of food even more.

If you follow these tips and strategies regularly, you will start to see a difference in your food expenditures. While you can't control the cost of fuel or food, if you manage your food dollars wisely, you will have more money in your wallet at the end of the month.

Get Moving-Get Healthy New Jersey...Workforce!

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It has become increasingly important for employers to be concerned about the health status of their employees. The nation's obesity rates are very high and health care costs are skyrocketing. The National Institutes of Health, Center for Disease Control Statistics (2007) report that 66% of U.S. adults are overweight, and that 32%, or 50 million adults, are obese.



Contributing factors to our nation's high obesity rates include an increased consumption of fat and sugar by eating too much fast food and a reduced level of activity. By increasing the use of technology in our daily lives we have decreased the amount of physical activity at home as well as in the workplace. Each year, an estimated 250,000 deaths are attributed to lack of physical activity (American Cancer Society).

A Healthier Workplace = Healthier Individuals and Communities

Research has shown that employees that participate in a workplace wellness program have fewer absences, are more productive on the job, and have fewer health care issues. If most Americans adopted a daily routine of brisk walking, the result would be a savings of billions of dollars in healthcare related costs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). For every \$1 spent on worksite wellness by the company it receives at least \$2.51 back in savings (Blue Cross of Indiana).

According to Healthy Workforce 2010, employers that offer wellness programs in the worksite will reap the following benefits:

- 1- **Improved Productivity.** Health promotion is an investment in human capital. Employees are more likely to be on the job and performing well when they are in optimal physical and psychological health. They are also more likely to be attracted to, remain with, and value a company

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VISIONS

is a peer reviewed newsletter published three times yearly and sent upon request, without charge.

Published by

Rutgers Cooperative Extension
Department of Family & Community Health Sciences

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Desktop publishing by: Arly Ditio Graphics

Printed November 2008

Fast Food.....Can It Be Healthy, In a Pinch?

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Busy schedules filled with work, school and countless activities can leave families with little time for sit-down meals. Between work, school and after-school commitments, eating out – or, rather, on the run – can be an unavoidable part of family meal time.

Fast food is a quick way to squeeze a meal into a fast-paced lifestyle. But, healthy, nutritious options can be hard to find. Most fast foods are low in key nutrients like vitamins A and C, iron, calcium and fiber. They're also usually higher in fat, saturated fat, calories, and sodium. So...what's a busy family to do?

Fast Food Dining Strategy

Ideally, it is healthiest to avoid the fast-food venue. In the event that you need a "quick fix" for a family meal, use these strategies to make smart choices at the drive thru or counter:

Once In A While – The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests keeping trips to fast-food restaurants as treats, rather than routine meals. If you keep your family's usual diet well balanced and low in fat, an occasional fast food trip won't hurt you. On the other hand, frequent consumption of high-fat foods – including cheeseburgers, chicken fingers and fries – is unhealthy for adults and children.

Variety – A balanced diet that includes a variety of foods will benefit your family's overall health, setting a standard for healthy eating habits. Look at what your family eats over the course of the whole day, rather than each meal by itself. If you know dinner will be a stop at a fast food venue, eat foods throughout the day that are lower in fat, calories and sodium to compensate for excesses you get in a fast food meal.

Smart Choices – When you do eat fast food, it's important to make the best choices you can and pay close attention to the selections your family makes at fast food restaurants. The American Dietetic Association reinforces this by saying that whenever your family dines out, pay attention to portion sizes of food and remember that drinks contain calories, too. Try these tips next time your family decides to stop for fast food:

Healthy Eating Tips

- **Watch the portion sizes.** For adults and older children, order the regular or child-size portion. Stay away from supersized or "combo" meals. For younger children, stick with the smallest child meal...don't upgrade to the newer "big kid" meals. These larger portions may be cheaper, but they're loaded with extra calories. Instead, pair a sandwich or entrée with a side salad. Or, if you're taking fast food home, buy the sandwiches and pair them with your own sides...canned soups, yogurt, salads, fresh fruit or vegetables with dip, or even pretzels.
- **Think about the whole day's food choices.** If you eat a fast food lunch, make your breakfast and dinner healthier meals that are light in calories, fat and sodium.

- **Choose grilled or broiled** chicken on whole grain bread with low-fat condiments like mustard, ketchup, salsa or low-fat mayonnaise if it's available.
- **Choose lean meats**, like turkey breast and thin-sliced roast beef from the deli.
- **Steer away from fried foods** like fries and chicken fingers. If your family can't resist them, order only a small serving or share an order.
- **Look for healthier "kid meal" options.** If your kids can't pass up the fries, order one "kids meal" with fries and another with fruit. Share the fruit and fries between two children or, between a parent and child.
- **Save empty calories** from soda and sweet tea. Look for healthier beverages such as water, low-fat milk, unsweetened tea, diet soft drinks or 100% fruit juice.



Get Moving-Get Healthy New Jersey...Workforce! - continued from page 2

that obviously values them. In short, a company's productivity depends on employee health. Reduced absenteeism, a reduction of employee health risks, job satisfaction, and employee morale are all a part of improved productivity.

- 2- **Lower Health Care Costs.** Medical cost savings from health promotion programs may be less evident than productivity gains; nevertheless, it is a fact that medically high-risk employees are medically high-cost employees. They both use more health care and generate higher health claim costs than their low-risk peers.
- 3- **An enhanced corporate image.** By promoting health beyond the workplace, a company will certainly gain respect and develop long-term interests. Although there is little data to discern the impact of community-wide health promotion activities on business success, there is no disputing that the health of a community is related to economic vitality of the business found there.

Everyone benefits from a worksite wellness program. **Healthier individuals** = lower co-pays & out of pocket costs, and improved quality of life. A **healthier workplace** = lower premiums, higher morale, improved productivity, and fewer employee sick days & absence. **Healthier communities** = improved quality of life and increased volunteerism within the community.

Preventing Cancer: New Recommendations to Live Your Life (Part II)



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In the previous issue of Visions, the work behind the report *Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity, and the Prevention of Cancer: a Global Perspective* by the World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) and the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) was explored. This ground breaking report provides us with guidelines that we truly can live our life by to decrease cancer risk. In this second part, we will review these recommendations.

#1 Weight Maintenance Tops the List

Be as lean as possible within the normal range of body weight – This first recommendation explains that weight maintenance may be one of the most important things we can do to protect ourselves from cancer. More specifically, it encourages maintaining a Body Mass Index (BMI) at the lower end of normal towards and through adulthood, and also avoiding an increase in waist circumference through adulthood.

#2 Get Moving-Get Healthy!

Be physically active as part of everyday life – Embracing an active life is also important for cancer risk reduction. We are encouraged to engage in moderate activity for at least 30 minutes each day, increasing this amount to 60 minutes as able while decreasing sedentary activities.

#3 Limit Energy-Dense Foods

Limit consumption of energy-dense foods/Avoid sugary drinks – This recommendation focuses on the need to avoid processed foods and beverages due to their probable contribution to the increase in obesity worldwide. An energy-dense food is one that provides a large amount of calories with limited nutritional benefit.

#4 Eat a Plant Today

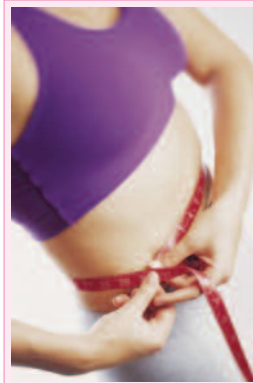
Eat mostly foods of plant origin – In this recommendation, we are encouraged to eat not only plant foods, but those that are minimally processed, such as whole grains and legumes with every meal, and at least two cups per day of a variety of fruits and non-starchy vegetables.

#5 Watch Intake of Red Meat

Limit intake of red meat and avoid processed meat – This recommendation is very specific, encouraging those who eat red meat to limit it to less than 18 oz each week and to have little, if any, processed meat. Red meat includes beef, pork and lamb and processed meat refers to products such as bacon and sausage.

#6 Limit Alcohol

Limit alcoholic drinks – This encourages those who drink alcohol to limit intake to no more than two drinks per day for men and one for women.



Measuring waist circumference

Place a tape measure around your bare abdomen just above your hip bone, with the tape snug, but not compressing your skin, and parallel to the floor.

A waist measurement of more than 35 inches for women or more than 40 inches for men may have a higher disease risk than people with smaller waist measurements because of where their fat lies. (www.nih.gov)

#7 Keep an Eye on Preserved and Processed Foods

Limit consumption of salt/Avoid moldy grains or legumes – Evidence has shown that salt and salt-preserved foods as well as those that have been contaminated with moulds pose a risk of cancer. These moulds can occur in foods such as peanuts and certain grains when they are stored too long in warm temperatures. Purchase these items when proper storage and turnover are assured.

#8 Supplements Are Not Recommended

Aim to meet nutritional needs through diet alone – Research has shown that the best way to obtain the nutrients that we need is through food. Dietary supplements have no definitive protection from cancer and may even cause cancer.

Special Recommendation #1: Mothers are encouraged to breastfeed infants exclusively up to six months as breastfeeding has been shown to be protective for the mother as well as the child.

Special Recommendation #2: Cancer survivors are encouraged to follow the same recommendations for cancer prevention and to receive nutritional care from a trained nutrition professional.

Body Mass Index (BMI)

BMI is your weight in relation to your height, and is closely associated with measures of body fat. Calculate your BMI using this formula:

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{weight (pounds)} \times 703}{\text{height squared (inches}^2\text{)}}$$

A BMI of 18.5 to 24.9 is considered healthy.

www.nih.gov

Source: World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research. *Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity, and the Prevention of Cancer: a Global Perspective*. Washington, DC: AICR, 2007.

Move More with a New Attitude!

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The latest statistics say that over half of the adults in the United States, are not getting the recommended daily amounts of physical activity although most people know that establishing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle means eating a balanced, nutritious diet and being physically active on a daily basis. Research has shown there are many health benefits associated with increasing one's level of physical activity. However, for many, the words "exercise" and "physically fit" can sound overwhelming.

The first step toward making the decision to become physically fit can mean developing a new attitude about physical activity and exercise and learning more about what it means to be physically fit. Physical fitness can be defined as "attributes a person has or achieves that relates to their ability to perform physical activity".¹ This definition does not limit physical fitness to a specific type of exercise, level of intensity, amount of weight able to be lifted, or distance one can run. The good news is that this definition leaves endless possibilities for achieving an individualized level of physical fitness.

Very simply, the goal of enhancing physical fitness is to improve the way the body functions. Here are five components of physical fitness to consider and examples of activities that help strengthen each of those areas:



✓ Cardiorespiratory Endurance

Are your body's circulatory and respiratory systems able to supply adequate blood flow and oxygen to help you sustain the activity?

Activities like: walking, aerobics

✓ Muscular Strength

Is your body able to exert the necessary force required for the activity?

Activities like: weight lifting, taking the stairs

✓ Muscular Endurance

Is your body able to perform the activity without fatigue?

Activities like: bicycling, dancing

✓ Flexibility

How far is your range of motion?

Activities like: Swimming, yoga

✓ Body Composition

How much fat versus lean tissue and muscle, bone, and other vital parts is your body made of?

10 Ways to Motivate Yourself with a New Attitude

- Choose something you like to do or want to try; make your physical activities as enjoyable as possible.
- Understand there is no "right" or "wrong" activity.
- Set small goals for yourself.
- Stay active throughout the day as shorter stretches of time still count.
- Check with your doctor about recommendations for your specific needs. Anyone at any age or weight can benefit from staying active
- Find ways to keep moving indoors.
- Make getting physically fit personal. Know that you are doing something for you and you will feel better for it.
- Utilize some of that television time and tune into a fitness program and join in.
- Take some of the normal time spent with the family to do something active.
- Know that the goal is to stay active, not necessarily become a star athlete.

Looking at physical activity and fitness from a new and fresh outlook can increase the likelihood that you will see the benefits of moving more - helping you to stay active with a new attitude!

Source: ¹Centers for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/everyone/glossary

How to Stay Healthy in a "Sick" Economy

Patricia Q. Brennan, Senior Extension Trainer, Morris County



Is there anyone who is not worried about today's weak economy? Not many according to the most recent Consumer Confidence Survey™ conducted for The Conference Board. Here are five tips for keeping your finances healthy:

1. DON'T COMMIT YOURSELF TO NEW OBLIGATIONS – If you think your employment is at risk now or may be in the near future, be cautious about taking on new financial obligations such as a house addition or renovation, car lease, or a big vacation.

Also, make a concerted effort to reduce your monthly out-go. For example, trim your credit card balances. Should you lose your job, the payments could overnight become a millstone. A good rule of thumb is to limit your basic monthly expenses to 50% or less of your pre-tax income.

2. KNOW YOUR CREDIT SCORE – More than ever, consumers are struggling to keep up with their bills and the rising cost of living. In this sinking economy lenders are getting more picky about whom they will lend money to. This means it is doubly important to look creditworthy. Be aware that you can damage your FICO score by paying your mortgage late, paying credit cards late or even applying for additional new cards. Using more than 20 or 30 percent of each card's credit limit can also hurt your score. To get your credit score go to www.myfico.com. The cost is \$15.95 for the "standard" report.

3. SEARCH FOR SAVINGS OPPORTUNITIES – Reports about high gas prices and rising food bills are all over the news. But not all prices are climbing. Look no further than the real-estate market where prices have been falling since mid 2006 according to the S & P Case-Shiller U.S. National Home Price Index. If you have a secure job, this could be a good time to buy that first home. You will also find bargains on new and used cars as car manufacturers are having a difficult time unloading their inventory. Consider having traditionally seasonal jobs done off-season, such as awning installation, patios, new or replacement air conditioning systems. You can save up to 30% on in-season prices.

4. LOOK BEYOND TODAY'S DIRE HEADLINES – The recent newspaper and TV headlines underscore difficult economic times, including slowing growth, greatly lowered consumer confidence and mass layoffs.

In previous recessions, the stock market began rising before the economic news was optimistic. The most important lesson to learn from the Wall Street debacle is that you should not panic and sell -- or you may discover you sold at just the wrong time. This is particularly true if you have at least 5 to 10 years before you need the money.

5. TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR FINANCES – To get a better handle on your financial life, start by making a list of your investments, your debts, real estate, insurance policies, and estate-planning documents. Next, count up your income from all sources. Then track your expenses over a period of several months. This will help you to spot spending leaks and set up a budget you can live with.



Barbara O'Neill, Ph.D., CFP®,
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"Take the Time" is the theme of the Sussex County Chamber of Commerce Wellness Committee, which uses these words to encourage area residents to make room in their busy lives for daily exercise, nutritious meals, and health screening exams. This phrase was also used on a recent television segment about households reducing their living expenses. Someone who was successful in bringing family finances under control advised viewers to "take the time and keep focused on it."

Time affects health and wealth in three different ways:

- 1. Time required to improve health and finances. For example, losing 10 pounds in a year requires eating 100 calories less each day or burning off 100 additional calories through daily exercise. A comparable financial example is increasing credit card payments to reduce debt repayment time and interest charges.**
- 2. Time deadlines for personal goals (e.g., someone's time frame to lose 20 pounds or save \$3,000).**
- 3. Time available to perform recommended practices such as exercise and financial record-keeping.**

Finding time every day to improve health and finances takes determination but the results are well worth the effort. Daily progress builds upon itself, just like compound interest. If you do something consistently, at least 5 times a week, you will make steady progress. Each small step adds to the ones before it.

A common reason given for inattention to health and personal finances is "lack of time." People hear that they need to exercise 30 to 60 minutes a day and automatically say "I'm too busy." Fitness experts say, however, that you can accumulate those minutes throughout the day in 10 to 15 minute "chunks" of time. Gradual progress is also fine for financial maintenance tasks such as calculating net worth, requesting free credit reports, and preparing written financial goals and budgets.

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Healthy Meals for Busy Families

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Making Meals a Family Affair

The benefits of family meals are abundant. Families are more likely to eat a nutritious meal when most or all of the family eats together. Families who eat at home have control of portion sizes and ingredient choices. Children who eat with their families are likely to consume more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. They are also less likely to smoke, drink and use illegal drugs during their teen years. Enjoying meals together enhances family communication and improves manners, too. And, of course, there is a lifetime of positive memories that sharing meals together creates.

Busy schedules, long commutes, homework, evening sports events and other commitments have nibbled away at family meal time. Today, home-cooked meals are becoming rare. How can you preserve family mealtime despite a busy schedule? Here are a few simple tips to whip up nutritious and delicious family fare in a flash.

Make Healthy Eating Happen

Step 1: Get Ready

Involve all family members in menu planning. Give each person the chance to talk about their food likes and dislikes, favorite recipes, and what they'd like to see on the family menu. Give family members tasks such as helping out with shopping for food, unpacking groceries, setting the table, or cooking. Brainstorm a list of meal ideas and write them down so you can use them again and again.

Step 2: Plan Main Courses

Start with the "main attraction." Decide on the main course for each meal over the coming week. Think about foods your family enjoys, your budget, the time you have to prepare the food, and nutrition. Look for chances to use leftovers from one meal to another, later in the week. Once you come up with a main course for each meal, add on side dishes (vegetables, fruit and whole-grain side dishes such as brown rice or whole wheat pasta) and a healthy beverage like low-fat milk or water.

Step 3: Stock the Kitchen with Staples

Stocking the pantry, refrigerator and freezer is a good habit to get into. Keep a few essential ingredients on hand to make it easy to prepare a quick and tasty meal. Check out these sites for tips on stocking up with staple foods:

<http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS273>

<http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS274>

Step 4: Cooking Made Easy

Try these strategies to spend less time preparing and more time enjoying a family meal:

- Save prep time with packaged, ready-to-eat fresh vegetables, such as baby carrots, salad mixes, and chopped or shredded broccoli and cauliflower.
- Use frozen vegetables to make a stir-fry. Add skinless chicken. Serve on top of a quick brown rice, whole wheat pasta or noodles with side of garlic bread.
- Cook vegetables on the grill. Drizzle them with olive oil and seasoning and wrap in aluminum foil, or place in foil tray to cut down on clean-up time.
- Try making fried rice or risotto, or mix cooked rice with leftover vegetables and meat. Use quick cook rice to decrease the cooking time.
- Mix kidney or refried beans, taco seasoning and a bit of salad in a taco shell or roll up in whole wheat wrap for a quick, nutritious meal.
- Use a crock pot or slow cooker for quick and convenient casseroles. Turkey breast in a crock pot makes a healthy, easy meal. Just place the turkey in the crock pot, cover _ with fat-free turkey gravy, cover and cook on low for seven hours. Before serving, drain gravy from crock pot. Complete the meal with sides of mashed potatoes, steamed broccoli and freshly heated gravy.



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How do you find chunks of time to improve your health and wealth? You look for them and dedicate them to making daily progress. There are 1,440 minutes in a day or 144 ten-minute chunks of time. Subtract about 7 hours for sleep and that leaves 100. Another way to "find time" is "smart multi-tasking." Read a mutual fund prospectus or exercise while watching television, for example. Carve out time wherever you can.

Once you've identified blocks of time to perform recommended health and financial practices, do two more things to improve both aspects of your life: automate and self-monitor. Automation

eliminates the need to decide to do something. You just do it on a regular schedule or it gets done automatically. Examples are exercising regularly every morning and having part of your pay deducted for 401(k) plan contributions. Self-monitoring (e.g., wearing a pedometer and calculating net worth annually) involves tracking progress over time. When people measure or monitor their behavior, they are often inspired to do better.

For additional information about small steps that you can take to improve your health and finances, visit Rutgers Cooperative Extension's Small Steps to Health and Wealth™ Web site at <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/sshw/>. Today is the first day of the rest of your life. Take the time!

Tomatoes and *Salmonella*

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Tomatoes are a fresh produce item with wide popularity, and about 5 billion pounds of them are consumed annually in the United States alone. Unfortunately, since 1990 at least 12 *Salmonella*-related outbreaks of foodborne disease, have been associated with tomatoes, and including the “red, round”, “Roma” and “grape” varieties. Most recently a very large outbreak linked to a strain known as *Salmonella* Saintpaul was thought to be associated with tomatoes, particularly early in the outbreak.

Tomatoes can become contaminated in the field by several means including the use of poor quality water for irrigation, the use of improperly composted manure or the presence of animal feces in the field. The risk may be higher when tomatoes have small cracks or tears in the skin which may allow *Salmonella* to get inside a tomato. The manner in which restaurants or consumers store and handle tomatoes may also provide favorable conditions for *Salmonella* to multiply. *Salmonella* that are present in low numbers on the surface of a whole tomato are dried out and are not able to grow and multiply. When those same tomatoes are sliced or cut, however, the inert bacteria revive and can start to multiply, especially if tomatoes are not properly refrigerated.

Current evidence indicates that in most outbreaks tomatoes are likely contaminated in the field at low levels, and then the *Salmonella* bacteria multiply once the tomatoes are cut, which increases the risk and the possibility of infection.

The US Food and Drug Administration (US FDA) is well aware of the problem and created a Tomato Safety Initiative starting in the summer of 2007 in order to reduce tomato-linked *Salmonella* outbreaks; this program focuses food safety efforts on products, practices, and suspected growing areas. With efforts from all parts of the food chain - growers, harvesters, packers, retailers, food service employees, consumers, and food scientists conducting research – we can all work together to improve the safety of the food.

What can I do to minimize my risk?

It is important to realize that tomatoes are a nutritious food that is low in fat and high in dietary fiber, Vitamin A, and Vitamin C. Most tomatoes in the market today are *Salmonella*-free and can be part of a healthy diet. When selecting tomatoes in the store, be sure to pick only intact tomatoes, without visible cuts or scars. Wash tomatoes carefully, but realize that scientific research has shown that washing will only remove 90 to 99% of any bacterial contamination that may be present. If making salsa or any other dish containing fresh tomatoes, be sure to refrigerate any unused portion within 2 hours of preparation. Tomatoes that are cooked to a temperature of 160° F or higher are unlikely to contain any live *Salmonella*. When shopping for salsa or any other dishes containing cut tomatoes, either purchase shelf stable products in glass jars or metal cans that have been heated to destroy many other harmful foodborne pathogens, or purchase refrigerated products (generally packed in plastic tubs) that are properly refrigerated. New Jersey state law requires cut tomatoes (or any other cut fruits and vegetables) to be stored at 41° F or below. If you are unsure if a food you plan to purchase is properly refrigerated, be sure to ask a store employee or manager.