

Cooperative Extension

Cooking Brings Kids & Families Together

Vrushabh Shah, *Nutritional Science Intern, Boston University*

Michelle F. Brill, MPH, *Family & Community Health Sciences Educator, Mercer County*



Today, fewer and fewer schools teach home economics/life skills classes. A harsh economy means a tighter budget and schools all over the country have cut programs, particularly ones such as life skills. As a result, basic lessons taught in these programs, including cooking, are left to be taught at home. Parents and children now have the opportunity to work together and learn from each other right in their own kitchens. When nutritious foods are prepared using healthy cooking techniques, children are more likely to establish healthy eating patterns that last a lifetime.

Cooking together is beneficial in many ways. Research shows that involving kids in family meals helps to foster family togetherness, prevents behavior problems, and leads to better results for children in school. Kids develop a richer vocabulary and build their communication skills. The social skills that meal planning, food preparation, and sharing provide are vital for school success and beyond. Furthermore, children will be given the opportunity to apply important lessons outside of the classroom. Children gain crucial training in areas of mathematics and physical science from learning how to count and measure specific ingredients to understanding what 'hot' truly means or what happens when two things are mixed together. By working with their parents and each other, children practice cooperative learning. They can experience the pride that comes with producing a product that is enjoyed by people who are important to them. This spirit of team work will carry over to other aspects of their lives.

What can kids do? Children of all ages can help set the table, prepare meals and snacks, and help clean up. Younger children, from five to nine years old, can place the utensils, napkins, plates, and cups on the table. Older children, ages nine to thirteen, can help serve the meals, pour drinks, and manage other tasks during the meal. Not only will the children understand the hard work that goes into preparing a family meal, but they will develop a strong sense of self-worth, and realize they can do a lot.

Most children have an innate curiosity and interest in food and cooking, but may feel that cooking is a chore. Setting a positive tone and recognizing their efforts will encourage them to do more. A motivated family is a successful family and research suggests a more healthy family. Kids will be comfortable eating with other people and proud that they helped contribute to the meal. Parents will see their son or daughter grow, mature, and learn good eating habits while practicing good social skills with those around the dinner table. It is a win-win for everybody involved.

continued on page 2

In This ISSUE

Cooking Brings Kids & Families Together	1-2
The Omega-3s Hype May Seem Fishy, But You Still Might Want to Get Hooked on Them!	3
Will New School Lunch Plan Get Kids to Eat More Fruits & Veggies?	4
Coconut Oil: Bad or Good?	5
Health and Wealth Connections: Evidence From Research Studies and Current News	6
Managing Kitchen Cross Contamination Risks	7
Food for Thought on Donating This Holiday Season!	8



"Fabulous French Toast"

from www.kidshealth.org

Prep Time: ~15 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1 egg
- ¼ cup milk
- Dash of vanilla extract
- 1 tbsp. margarine
- 2 pieces of bread

Utensils:

- Medium-size bowl
- Mixing spoon
- Frying pan
- Stove (use with guardian/parent)
- Spatula
- Serving plate
- Measuring cups & spoons

Directions:

1. Wash your hands.
2. Crack the egg into a medium-size bowl and beat well. Then mix in the milk and vanilla extract.
3. Put the margarine in a frying pan. Heat the pan on the stovetop on medium heat. It's hot enough when the margarine starts to bubble.
4. Dunk each piece of bread in the egg mixture. Make sure the bread is totally covered.
5. Cook the bread in the frying pan on low heat until the underside is light brown (about 5 minutes).
6. Use a spatula to flip the bread over and cook again for another 5 minutes.
7. Use the spatula to transfer the French toast to a plate.

Serving Size: 1 slice

Nutritional Analysis

(per serving):

- 162 calories
- 6 g protein
- 9 g fat
- 13 g carbohydrate
- 0 g fiber
- 107 mg cholesterol
- 218 mg sodium
- 80 mg calcium
- 1.1 mg iron

Age Appropriate Cooking Skills

Age 2-3:

- Stir with a spoon or other appropriate utensil
- Shake ingredients in a plastic container with cover
- Mash boiled fruits and vegetables
- Make no-cook recipes such as sandwiches and salads
- Practice with whisks and cookie cutters

Age 3-6:

- Stir ingredients together
- Wash fruits & vegetables in hot water
- Tear lettuce to make base of salad
- Add solid and liquid ingredients to a bowl and mix
- Use butter knife for spreading

Ages 6-8:

- Measure ingredients
- Set the table
- Beat ingredients with a wire whisk
- Use a knife to cut soft foods

Ages 8-10:

- Use a can opener
- Use a microwave oven
- Use a blender
- Prepare simple recipes such as milkshakes or sandwiches

Ages 10-12:

- Use an oven to make various baked goods (with adult supervision)
- Use a knife to chop different vegetables (with adult supervision)
- Use grater to shred ingredients for salad (with adult supervision)

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

Editors:

Karen Enns, EdD, RD, FADA, CFCS
Family & Community Health Sciences Educator

Daryl L. Minch, M.Ed., CFCS
Family & Community Health Sciences Educator

Marilou Rochford, MA, CFLE
Family & Community Health Sciences Educator

Financial Manager: **Lynn Reid**

Please send any questions to:
Rutgers Cooperative Extension
Dept. of Family & Community Health Sciences
88 Lipman Drive, New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8525
848-932-3661

Portions of this newsletter may be reproduced with the use of a courtesy line.
Desktop publishing by: **Arly Ditio Graphics**

Printed December, 2012

The Omega-3s Hype May Seem Fishy, But You Still Might Want to Get Hooked on Them!

Deepika Bangia, M.S., *Nutritional Sciences Department, Rutgers University*

Debra M. Palmer, Ph.D., *Extension Specialist in Community Nutrition, Rutgers Cooperative Extension*

It's hard to pick up a magazine or news article about health without reading about omega-3s. Unfortunately, much of what you read or hear may not be true. Here's what scientists actually know about omega-3s, and what you should know too!



Scientists know that:

- The regular consumption of seafood contributes to the prevention of heart disease and cardiac death among people who do not already suffer from cardio-vascular disease.
- Omega-3s derived from fish oil are the only nutrient that has been approved by FDA as a pharmaceutical that is used to lower elevated triglyceride levels.
- Adequate consumption of the kind of omega-3s that come from fish improves pregnancy outcomes.



Scientists are not sure, but a fair number of studies suggest that increased consumption of omega-3s may also:

- Support good eyesight and reduce the likelihood of getting macular degeneration
- Reduce fat accumulation in the liver (fatty liver disease)
- Lower levels of inflammation that cause joint pain
- Reduce your chance of getting some cancers, such as colon and breast
- Reduce blood clotting time (it's a blood thinner)
- Have a positive effect on mental health, especially regarding some mental problems associated with aging.



Here's what YOU need to know about omega-3s and health! There are many kinds of omega-3s. The most common ones are nicknamed EPA, DHA, and ALA. EPA and DHA are found in fish and some other animal sources. ALA is a plant-based omega-3.

Often, people who write the articles you read and even doctors, think all omega-3s offer the same health benefits. They don't! So if you regularly eat fish and other seafood you have hit the omega-3 jackpot.

Contrary to some of the things you may read, consuming more ALA, which is found in foods like flax, flaxseeds and walnuts, will not result in any of the health benefits mentioned above. Flax and walnuts are healthy foods that provide other health benefits, but they will not help with most of the health benefits reported from most studies.

When you are trying to increase your omega-3s look for foods or supplements rich in DHA and/or EPA. Your goal should be to eat seafood, like salmon, tuna, or sardines, at least twice a week (approximately 8 ounces total) or to consume an average 250 mg per day of EPA and DHA combined. If you don't eat fish (or enough of it) you can get EPA and DHA from supplements or fortified foods like milk, eggs, and peanut butter. Just make sure if you buy omega-3 fortified foods they are fortified with EPA, DHA, or fish, NOT ALA or flax. To learn more about omega-3s and health or to download an omega-3 shopping companion podcast that will help you select omega-3 rich foods at the store, go to <http://www.extension.org/omega-3>.

Will New School Lunch Plan Get Kids to Eat More Fruits & Veggies?

Adapted from *Fruits & Vegetables, More Matters Website*

WHAT EXPERT SAY

Guiding children to make more nutritious meal choices at school will help to instill lifelong healthy habits and may help to decrease childhood obesity.

WHAT WE KNOW

There is a lot of research supporting the benefits of diets rich in fruits and vegetables. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), those who eat healthy diets abundant in fruits and vegetables have a decreased risk of chronic disease such as heart disease and certain types of cancer. Also, fruits and vegetables are low in calories and fat and they are packed with fiber. They keep you satisfied while providing your body with vital nutrients.

School lunch programs and USDA are working to increase the amount of fruits and vegetables children are consuming on a daily basis. New standards were implemented in the Fall 2012 to help kids make healthier meal choices and fight childhood obesity.

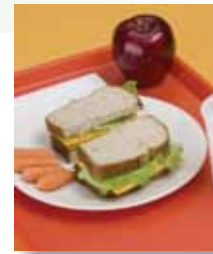
HOW DO WE KNOW THIS?

School lunch programs will focus on monitoring the trays of every student, making sure each tray meets the new requirements. Each tray must have at least one serving of a fruit or vegetable. Other changes include an increase in whole grains, inclusion of skim or 1% milk with each meal, and strict limits on saturated and trans fats, sodium, and calories. There will also be a wider variety of fruit and vegetable choices offered.

ADVICE FOR HOME

You can help your kids make healthy meal choices at home as well as in school. Try a few of these tips and ideas to make living a healthy lifestyle exciting and rewarding for them.

- **Play with Your Food:** Visit our kids' website, www.foodchamps.org, for games that educate kids on fruits, vegetables and healthy lifestyles.
- **Recruit Your Troops:** Enlist the help of your kids with food shopping and cooking. Download *Top 10 Ways to Get Kids Involved in Shopping & Cooking* at <http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/top-10-to-get-kids-involved> for a hands-on approach.
- **Kid's Choice:** Get your kids involved with meal planning. Have them pick the fruit or vegetable to be served with breakfast, lunch, and/or dinner. Help them research the fruit or vegetable of choice, then let your culinary expert announce a few fun facts about her/his star ingredient of the day.
- **It's My Party:** Invite your child's friends to get involved with her/his next birthday party. You can also host a cooking demo for kids. Try one of our *Healthy Recipes for Kids* at <http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/kid-friendly-healthy-recipes>. Have each child be in charge of a step in the recipe. You can also make chef's hats out of paper and encourage the kids to decorate their own!



Family & Community Health Sciences' (FCHS)

Tips for Making More Matter...

By **Luanne J. Hughes, MS, RD**, Family and Community Health Sciences Educator, Gloucester County

FCHS offers a number of fact sheets to help children, schools and families eat healthier and add more fruits and vegetables to their plates.

Visit our web site today and download some of these hot topics:

- **22 Quick & Easy Ways to Eat More Fruits and Vegetables** <http://www.njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS1079>
- **Everyone Loves Rewards – Fun Alternatives to Food: A Guide for Parents and Teachers** <http://www.njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS1063>
- **It's Time to Snack Smart** <http://www.njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS947>
- **Let's Eat: Healthier Snacks & Parties** <http://www.njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS1049>
- **Practical Ways to Trim High Grocery Prices** <http://www.njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS1097>

Coconut Oil: Bad or Good?

Saghar Sefidbakht, *Montclair State University Dietetic Intern*
Karen Ensle EdD, RD, FADA, CFCS, *Family and Community Health Sciences Educator,*
Union County



What is coconut oil?

Coconut oil is a vegetable oil that is solid at room temperature. It has a sweet flavor, which makes it a popular choice in baking.

What makes coconut oil different from other vegetable oils?

Vegetable oils including coconut oil do not have cholesterol. However, in contrast to most vegetable oils, coconut oil is very high in saturated fats (SFA) with 92% of its fats being saturated. The majority of SFAs are from animal sources and are solid at room temperature. What makes coconut oil so different is its unusually high content of Medium Chain Triglycerides (MCTs). Most oils have mainly long chain triglycerides (LCT). MCTs are healthier than LCTs because in the body they get burned faster and yield 10% less calories.

The “bad” and the “good”!

This unusually high amount of saturated fats (SFAs) and MCTs give different characteristics to the coconut oil. Dietary SFA can increase a person’s blood cholesterol level. High cholesterol increases the risk of heart disease. Therefore, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recommends that people abstain from the use of coconut oil, palm oil, and palm kernel oil which are all high in SFA. The American Heart Association categorizes SFAs and TRANS-fats as bad fats. They recommend that people limit their SFA intake to less than 7% of their daily energy intake. For instance if you need 2,000 calories per day, only 140 calories (about 1 ½ tablespoons oil) should be from SFA (16 grams of SFA). They explain that avoiding tropical oils (coconut oil, palm oil, and palm kernel oil) are a good way to limit your SFA intake.



However, as indicated in the most current research, the high MCT ratio in coconut oil (60% MCT) provides it with some advantages over the other high SFA oils including animal fats (like lard and cream) and hydrogenated vegetable oils (like shortening and margarines). “The MCTs are directly transported from the intestine to the liver where they are mostly burned off as fuel”, explains researcher Marie-Pierre St-Onge of Columbia University. This means the MCTs are less likely be stored in the body.

However, some media stories say coconut oil has special health benefits but there is no solid evidence that coconut oil can help a person lose weight or fight Alzheimer’s disease. There is no evidence that virgin coconut oil is any better for your heart than the conventional coconut oil. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov> . Coconut oil has no magical properties and should only be consumed in small amounts.

Coconut oil can be found in food products such as pastries, fried foods and popcorn mixes. Read ingredient lists on food labels and minimize eating foods high in saturated fats. Substituting other lower SFA oils such as corn, canola or safflower oils, instead of coconut oil would be beneficial.

Remember, coconut oil is very high in SFAs. SFAs increase the level of cholesterol in the blood which can lead to heart disease. Health professionals recommend limiting SFAs in our diets.

Health and Wealth Connections: Evidence From Research Studies and Current News

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



For the past decade, Rutgers Cooperative Extension's Small Steps to Health and Wealth™ (SSHW) program has encouraged people to take action to simultaneously improve their health and personal finances. SSHW also provides information about the associations between individuals' health status and financial well-being. Below are some recent research findings on obesity and the costs associated with this disease. Remember, taking better care of ourselves will improve both our finances and our health which impact our families and lifestyle at home and at work.

- **Paying Cash Curbs Spending on Unhealthy Items.** A 2011 study in the Journal of Consumer Research found that paying for food with cash can curb spending on unhealthy items. Using "plastic" of any type (i.e., a credit or a debit card) was found to lead to impulse purchases of high-calorie foods such as cookies, ice cream, and chips. It is theorized that this is because people don't feel the same "pain" (loss of their money) when buying something with plastic as they do when paying with cash.
- **Your Personal Qualities such as How You Organize Yourself Matter when trying to Improve Your Health and Finances.** A Florida State University psychology professor found that exhibiting self-control in one area of a person's life affects other areas. As summarized in an article by Money magazine (August 2012), "building up discipline in one area (e.g., exercising regularly) translates to being a more disciplined person generally."
- **Choosing Healthier Beverages will Save Healthcare Dollars.** A University of California study estimated that a one-cent-per-ounce tax on sweetened beverages, which would add twenty cents to a 20-oz bottle of soda costing about \$1.25, would prevent 2.4 million cases of diabetes, 95,000 cases of heart disease, and 26,000 premature deaths in the next decade.
- **Obesity Costs Our Society Extra Dollars and Pushes Employers to Discriminate.** A study of obesity in workplace hiring decisions reported in the International Journal of Obesity, found that women who were obese were not chosen for their leadership potential. A 2007 Michigan State University study found that women were 16 times more likely than men to report weight discrimination at work.
- **Obese Workers Will Pay More for Their Health Insurance.** Starting in 2014, the 2010 health care reform act will allow employers to charge obese workers 30 to 50 percent more for health insurance if they decline to participate in a qualified employee wellness program. Exceptions can be made for workers who can't participate due to certain health conditions (e.g., asthma).
- **Money Spent on Obesity could be Invested for Other Purposes.** A 2011 George Washington University study calculated the individual cost for being obese at \$4,879 for women and \$2,646 for men. Obese women earn less than women of normal weight but wages don't differ for obese men. If these dollar amounts were invested annually over a 40-year career at an 8% average annual return, an obese woman could have over \$1.2 million and an obese man almost \$700,000.
- **Obesity Slows Down Worker Productivity.** The total annual cost of workplace "presenteeism" due to obesity is estimated at \$30 billion. This means that obese employees are on the job but their productivity is reduced due to shortness of breath, pain, and other health-related factors. Not surprisingly, decreased productivity often results in reduced wages. A Cornell University health economist found that obese women earn about 11% less than women of healthy weight. Based on an average U.S. weekly wage of \$669 in 2010, he calculated a \$76 weekly "obesity tax." Over a person's entire career, this can add up to tens of thousands of dollars of lost earnings.



Managing Kitchen Cross Contamination Risks

Dane Jensen, Graduate Student, Food Science, Rutgers University

Donald Schaffner, PhD, Extension Specialist in Food Science, Rutgers Cooperative Extension

With the holidays right around the corner, many at-home chefs are preparing to cook their best meals. While fresh ingredients are wonderful, they do come with risks that need to be managed. For example, the risk of foodborne illness from pathogenic bacteria is higher with fresh produce, than with similar canned items. Furthermore, washing fresh ingredients is not always advisable, and can possibly increase the risk of foodborne illness.



Tips for washing foods:

Meat/Poultry: There is no need to wash raw poultry or other meats prior to cooking. Washing does little to decrease the concentration of pathogenic bacteria like Salmonella, E. coli O157:H7 or Listeria monocytogenes on raw meat and poultry, and washing can spread contamination around your kitchen. Any time water contacts raw meat or poultry, it can spread bacteria. For example, while brining is a popular method for preparing poultry, and it does make for delicious food, take care not to spill the brining broth in the refrigerator or on kitchen surfaces. If a spill does occur, clean it up quickly with soap, water and paper towels followed by bleach or other sanitizer. Also remember that brine broths can become contaminated by bacteria, and should never be reused.



Fish: Some fish recipes call for soaking, which should always be done in a clean bowl in the refrigerator. As with meat or poultry, take care not to accidentally spread the soaking solution.

Eggs: Most eggs have already been washed during handling and placement into the carton. Farm fresh eggs may still have a natural protective coating on the shell, and should not be washed.

Pre-packaged bagged fresh produce: Pre-packaged produce (like salad greens or baby carrots) have typically already been washed by the processor, and an additional wash is not necessary. Read the label carefully, and if the label states that it has been washed (most labels do indicate washing or even "triple-washing") additional washing is not needed, and may even re-contaminate the food.



Un-bagged produce: For loose produce items that are sold un-bagged (head lettuce, cucumbers, peppers, etc.), a cold water wash is useful to remove dirt. Be sure to use a clean vegetable brush and clean water to wash these items. Root vegetables (like potatoes) or some fruits with a hard skin (like cantaloupe) can be scrubbed with a scrub brush in cold water to remove dirt. Be sure to clean the scrub brush after each use using soap and water, or in the dishwasher.

Other tips to lower risk

- Before beginning any food preparation, make sure all kitchen counters and cutting boards are clean and sanitary.
- Always clean and sanitize surfaces between preparing foods that need to be cooked (meats), and foods that are not going to be cooked (salads).
- Use separate cutting boards and knives for meats/poultry vs. produce or wash between uses.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds before preparing food and after handling raw meat/poultry, and eggs. You may follow hand washing with a hand sanitizer for added safety. Some cooks like to wear disposable gloves while handling raw meat/poultry and eggs. However, hand washing is still required before and after glove use.

Food for Thought on Donating This Holiday Season!

Debra M. Palmer, Ph.D., *Extension Specialist in Community Nutrition, Rutgers Cooperative Extension*

It's not how much we give but how much love we put into giving" – Mother Teresa

When you give to or sponsor a food drive this holiday season, put a little extra love into what might be most helpful to those in need. Here are some tips to consider.

- Consider giving cans with “pop tops” or add a can opener to your donations. Those in need often don’t own things we take for granted, like can openers!
- Food pantry workers say it’s wonderful when people put a little extra thought into their gifts by donating food in “sets.” For example, why not contribute a box of pasta along with a jar of sauce and a container of parmesan cheese; canned tuna with mayonnaise; or whole-wheat crackers with jams?
- Open your heart by donating non-perishable foods that cost a little bit more, but that will REALLY be appreciated by kids and families this holiday season. Consider contributing foods such as canned fish and meat. Boxes of hot and cold cereals, peanut butter, cans and pouches of poultry or fish, and nuts are some other examples. Also, don’t forget that powdered milk is a welcome addition in many places that do not have refrigeration.
- Toiletries are needed and cherished as well. Sometimes people are fortunate enough to receive federal or local assistance with food, but have no way of obtaining items like plastic food storage containers, diapers, feminine hygiene products, or even deodorant, soaps and shampoos. For those without homes, blankets, coats, hats, and gloves head their list of needs.
- While these gifts may help maximize your giving, if possible, the best offering to an established food pantry is money. According to Kathleen Decker, who oversees the Rutgers Against Hunger (RAH) program, because of the special food access opportunities made available to food pantries and programs like RAH, a donation of \$1- \$2 can provide 28 pounds of food that can be accessed through food banks! If you’d like, you can donate food, time, or money to RAH by logging into: <http://rah.rutgers.edu/get-involved/donate>.

This year especially, put a little extra love into your giving. Many New Jersey residents will appreciate your willingness to give to themselves and their families. Add a little extra thought into what you donate and enjoy the fruits of your labors all season long!

