

**Cooperative Extension**

*Promoting Healthy Families, Schools and Communities: Making a Difference*

**Building Your Strength  
and Easing Arthritis Pain**

Angela Debartolome, MS, Dietetic Intern and Rachel Tansey, MA, FCHS Educator and Preceptor, Monmouth County



Arthritis, a wearing condition affecting joints and muscles, often leads to pain and reduced mobility. However, strength training has become a powerful tool to combat these symptoms, offering many physical and mental benefits. By enhancing muscle support, improving joint stability, and boosting overall well-being, strength training can help individuals with arthritis reclaim their mobility and improve their quality of life.

Arthritis covers over 100 conditions affecting the joints and surrounding tissues. The most common types are osteoarthritis, which involves the breakdown of cartilage in joints, and rheumatoid arthritis, an autoimmune disease-causing inflammation of the joint lining. Common symptoms include joint pain, stiffness, swelling, and reduced range of motion. These symptoms can make keeping an active lifestyle difficult, leading to muscle weakness and further joint instability. Keeping muscle strength is essential for supporting the joints and lessens the physical challenges associated with arthritis.

Strength training, also referred to as resistance training, involves exercises designed to improve muscle strength and endurance. These exercises can include lifting weights, using resistance bands, or performing body-weight exercises like push-ups and squats. For individuals with arthritis, strength training is particularly important as it helps to support and protect the joints by strengthening the muscles around them. One key benefit of strength training is its ability to enhance overall body function. Stronger muscles reduce the strain on joints, leading to decreased pain and improved stability. Additionally, strength training can increase bone density, important for preventing or slowing the progression of osteoporosis.

Regardless of these benefits, many people with arthritis still hesitate to engage in strength training due to some popular myths and misconceptions. Some believe that lifting weights can trigger joint pain or cause further damage. However, when done correctly, strength training can be both safe and effective for managing arthritis symptoms. Research found that strength training benefits older people with osteoarthritis, showing significant improvements in strength, function, and pain reduction. Moreover, the American College of Rheumatology includes strength training in its treatment guidelines for knee and hip osteoarthritis. For rheumatoid arthritis, studies have shown that dynamic strength training can lead to significant

*continued on page 7*

**In This ISSUE**

<b>Building Your Strength and Easing Arthritis Pain</b>	1,7
<b>Celebrating Women’s Health and Fitness</b>	2
<b>Tips to Help Older Adults Beat the Holiday Blues</b>	3
<b>The Almighty Protein</b>	4
<b>Botanical Benefits: Growing your Own Herbs</b>	5,7
<b>Net Worth: A Year-End Financial Check-Up</b>	6



With the busyness of daily life, prioritizing health can take a back seat, especially for many women juggling their personal and professional lives. To celebrate women's health, raise awareness about healthy living, and signify the benefits of regular exercise, the National Women's Health and Fitness Day was created in 2002. This day is observed on the last Wednesday of each September. Proper health and fitness are essential for everyone; however, women have unique needs, especially when reproductive health care and the intersections of gender identity, race, ethnicity, and lived experience are taken into consideration. This national health observance day is important as research and advocacy for equitable women's healthcare evolves.

Women have experienced various disparities in healthcare delivery over the years, including receiving lower-quality health services and having inadequate access to care in general. Such differences are attributed to economic, environmental, social, and political factors. Ultimately these disparities impact overall quality of life and health outcomes, reinforcing the need for women's health equity. "Women's health equity refers to the state in which all individuals who are women and/or were assigned female at birth have a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health."

Prioritizing women's health and fitness can be beneficial for preventing the onset or delaying the progression of health conditions affecting women. According to information published by the Office on Women's Health (OWH), the leading causes of death among women include heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic lower respiratory disease (e.g., asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer), and Alzheimer's disease. In addition, National Health Interview Survey data states that 15.2% of U.S. women aged 18 and older are in fair or poor health. Pre-COVID-19 data reported that 42% of women aged 20 or older were categorized as obese, and 45.7% of women aged 18 and older were diagnosed with hypertension. Lack of exercise, increasing rates of obesity, high blood pressure, and other factors contribute to morbidity and mortality rates for women.

### Despite these statistics, there are plenty of ways for women to improve their health and fitness.

- ◆ **Get regular physical and well-woman exams.** Health exams include checking blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol levels, and preventative cancer screenings.
- ◆ **Know the numbers of your blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol, and weight.** Monitoring these numbers will help you manage your overall health.
- ◆ **Get moving!** Find ways to incorporate physical activity into your daily routine. Current Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend that adults engage in 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity weekly.
- ◆ **Consume a balanced diet.** Aim to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables. Be mindful of food high in saturated fat, added sugar, and sodium.
- ◆ **Reduce stress.** This may be easier said than done but find ways to reduce stress such as enjoying a hobby, exercising, connecting with friends, or meditation.

Women, take the time to reflect on your health status and prioritize your health and fitness goals. This is a great time to celebrate your well-being and promote the health and wellness of women across the United States.

#### References:

- National Center for Health Statistics. Percentage of fair or poor health status for adults aged 18 and over, United States, 2019–2023. National Health Interview Survey. [https://wwwn.cdc.gov/NHISDataQueryTool/SHS\\_adult/index.html](https://wwwn.cdc.gov/NHISDataQueryTool/SHS_adult/index.html)
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention/National Center for Health Statistics – Women's Health <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/womens-health.htm>
- American Heart Association – Know Your Numbers <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/diabetes/prevention--treatment-of-diabetes/know-your-health-numbers>

## VISIONS

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

Published by  
Rutgers Cooperative Extension  
Department of Family & Community Health Sciences

Editors:

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

**Alexandra Greci, MS, RD, LDN, CDE**  
Family & Community Health Sciences Educator

**Rachel Tansey, MA**  
Senior FCHS Extension Associate

**Sara Elnakib, PhD, MPH, RDN**  
FCHS Department Chair

Financial Manager: **Deborah Blain**

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 October 2024

# Tips to Help Older Adults

## Beat the Holiday Blues

Kathleen Cullinen, Ph.D., RDN, FCHS Educator, Ocean County



Although the holidays are often associated with good food, family, and friends, they can also be challenging for many older adults who experience social isolation and loneliness. The US Surgeon General has identified social isolation and loneliness as important public health concerns increasingly recognized as health risks during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Loneliness is associated with an increased risk of heart disease, dementia, stroke, anxiety, and depression. In contrast, social connection is associated with increased longevity and better social, emotional, and physical well-being.

### What is the difference between social isolation and loneliness?

Although related, social isolation and loneliness are different. Loneliness is the distressing feeling of being alone or separated, while social isolation is the lack of social contacts and having few people to interact with regularly. One can live alone and not feel lonely or socially isolated, while one can feel lonely being with others. As we age, we are at higher risk for social isolation and loneliness that may result from hearing, vision, and memory loss, disability, decreased mobility, inability to access transportation, and/or the loss of family and friends. The risk of loneliness increases with social isolation.

### How common are social isolation and loneliness?

In January 2023, the University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging reported that 34% of older US adults (aged 50-80) reported feeling socially isolated, and 37% experienced loneliness. Loneliness affected women more than men and was particularly common among individuals with poorer physical and mental health, those with a health condition or disability that limited daily activities, and those who were unemployed, lived alone or were aged 50 to 64 years (compared with 65-80 years).



### Tips to decrease or prevent social isolation and loneliness

Social connections can reduce social isolation and loneliness during the holidays. Some tips to

decrease social isolation and loneliness include:

- › **Schedule daily time** to be in touch with family, friends, or neighbors.
- › **Attend events and programs** at local senior centers or libraries.
- › **Engage in online classes, lectures,** and faith-based or social groups.
- › **Participate** in group exercise classes.
- › **Volunteer** with local organizations.
- › **Join a support group** if navigating grief due to the loss of a loved one.

If your concerns of social isolation and loneliness persist, it is important to talk to your healthcare provider if you think you have depression.

### What are the signs and symptoms of depression?

- › **Persistent** sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- › **Feelings** of hopelessness, guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- › **Irritability, restlessness,** or having trouble sitting still
- › **Loss of interest** in once pleasurable activities, including sex
- › **Decreased energy** or fatigue
- › **Moving or talking** more slowly
- › **Difficulty concentrating,** remembering, or making decisions
- › **Difficulty sleeping,** waking up too early in the morning, or oversleeping
- › **Eating more or less** than usual, usually with unplanned weight gain or loss
- › **Thoughts of death or suicide**

Don't ignore the warning signs, especially if one or more last for more than two weeks. If left untreated, serious depression may lead to death by suicide.

**Contact someone if you need help.**

**If you are thinking about harming yourself, call 911** or go to a hospital emergency room to get immediate help. Call the 24-hour **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** at **988** or **800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)**. For TTY, use your preferred relay service or dial **711** and then **988**.

# The Almighty Protein

Sandra Hunka, Rutgers Dietetic Intern and  
Jennifer S. Taylor, FCHS Educator and Preceptor, Passaic County



## What is protein?

Protein, together with fat and carbohydrate, is a macronutrient needed for good health. Protein serves as the building block for your organs, bones, muscles, skin and hair and is needed for cell growth, repair and proper function. Essentially, our bodies need protein for everything they are designed to do!

Proteins are made of amino acids and the nutritional value of a protein is measured by the quantity of essential amino acids it contains. In general, animal products contain all the essential amino acids and are considered high quality proteins. Some plant products, such as soy, quinoa, and amaranth, are also high quality proteins. Other plant proteins, like lentils, beans, whole grains and nuts, lack at least one of the essential amino acids and are thought to be incomplete proteins. However, by eating a wide variety of foods, you can get all the protein you need. For example, eating meals that contain grains and legumes, such as rice and beans, will provide all the essential amino acids.

## The health benefits of eating protein

Eating the right amount of protein for your body can have multiple benefits:

- 1. Proteins carry oxygen** and nutrients through the body in red blood cells.
- 2. Eating the recommended amount of protein** daily helps maintain muscle mass, strength, and function and can reduce the risk of injury from falls.
- 3. Eating protein and fiber keeps us full longer**, reducing overeating and leading to easier weight management.
- 4. About half of the protein we eat daily supports** enzyme, antibodies, and cell growth to aid in digestion and immune responses.
- 5. Protein plays a key role in hormone regulation.**
- 6. Protein can help you have enough energy**, heal and recover faster from illness, wounds, and injuries.



## Where can we find protein in foods and how to healthfully increase protein in our diet?

Meet your protein needs creatively by incorporating healthy plant and animal sources.

- ✓ **Lean or low-fat meat and poultry** – Grill, broil, bake or boil to limit use of extra fat.
- ✓ **Fish and shellfish** – The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend adults eat about 2–3 servings a week (8oz).
- ✓ **Eggs** – versatile option to be enjoyed on their own or with other food groups.
- ✓ **Unsalted nuts and seeds** – great addition to salads, served on top of curries and stews, added to oatmeal, or the classic peanut butter and jelly sandwich!
- ✓ **Legumes** – beans are a perfect addition to stews, soups, sauces, and casseroles. Hummus and fresh vegetables are a great snack.
- ✓ **Soy products** – try tempeh or tofu in your meals. Edamame is another great way to get a high protein snack.
- ✓ **Low-fat dairy products** – Greek yogurt is high protein and extremely versatile. Enjoy as a snack, add to soup or salad instead of creamy dressing, or mix it with fruit and cereal for breakfast.
- ✓ **Whole grains** – Quinoa and amaranth provide all of the essential amino-acids and are rich in fiber.

### References:

- SNAP-ED, Family Meals - Look for Lean Protein, USDA, source: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/[https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/familymeals\\_lookforleanproteinfoods.pdf](https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/familymeals_lookforleanproteinfoods.pdf)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025. 9th Edition.
- USDA, Vary Your Protein, MyPlate, source: <https://www.myplate.gov/tip-sheet/vary-your-protein-routine>
- U.S. FDA, Interactive Nutrition Facts Label - Protein, October 2021, source: [https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/interactivenutritionfactslabel/assets/InteractiveNFL\\_Protein\\_October2021.pdf](https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/interactivenutritionfactslabel/assets/InteractiveNFL_Protein_October2021.pdf)
- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, How much protein should we eat?, eatright.org, October 05, 2022




# Botanical Benefits: Growing your Own Herbs

Anneliese Kuemmerle, MS, RDN, FCHS Program Associate, Cape May County



Fresh herbs are a simple and rewarding way to enhance the flavor of many meals. They elevate even the simplest of dishes with their unique flavors and aromatic profiles. Preparing them during cooking can be an aromatherapy session all on its own. The next time you are cooking, stop and smell the basil. Herbs are easy to grow in containers outdoors or perched in a sunny windowsill as an edible houseplant.

With food prices projected to rise in 2025, you may be looking for ways to help your food budget. One of the best things we can do is focus on preparing more of our meals at home. The United States Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service has predicted that food-away-from-home prices will rise by 3.1 percent in 2025, while food-at-home prices will rise by 1.1 percent. "Food-away-from-home" includes food from restaurants, cafeterias, vending machines, delivery and take-out. "Food-at-home" is food we buy at the grocery store or supermarket. Making more of our meals at home can help keep us in the at-home category where prices are predicted to increase at a lower rate.

Going to the store to buy each ingredient needed for specific recipes can be daunting. Having a well-stocked pantry makes it easier to make meals with ingredients you already have on hand. Growing your own herbs is a great way to have a "living pantry." Fresh herbs growing in a sunny window or on your porch are readily available at your convenience. While a few dollars here and there spent on herbs at the store does not seem like a lot each week, these costs add up over time. At the time of writing this article, a 0.5 oz plastic sleeve of individually packaged herbs costs \$2.49. If you purchase two of these each week, they cost \$258.96 a year!

The "living pantry" can also reduce food waste. Culinary herbs growing in your garden or as potted plants don't have the limited shelf life of the pre-cut, pre-packaged herbs you find in the produce section. Using herbs from a living plant minimizes waste because you can harvest exactly what you need for your dish. This also reduces your dependence on plastic packaging.

Another benefit of a "living pantry" is helping us eat healthier. If you have fresh herbs growing within easy reach of the kitchen, you are more likely to use them. Fresh herbs are a great way to add flavor to dishes without adding extra salt. Fresh herbs also have many vitamins and phytonutrients. Just one tablespoon of fresh chopped basil is a good source of vitamin K, which is important for blood clotting and building strong bones. Herbs and spices contain polyphenols, or aromatic compounds. These are powerful antioxidants that can help protect the body from free radicals. They have also been shown to increase the diversity of the human gut microbiome, supporting gut health.

*continued on page 7*

## Tips for Starting an Herb Garden:



- Grow herbs that match the flavor profile of foods you like to eat and already cook. Think about your favorite recipes and what herbs you use in them. Reflect on what you typically buy at the store frequently and start with growing those herbs.
- If you are keeping your herbs inside, a sunny window (ideally south facing) that gets at least six hours of sunlight each day will help your plants grow to their full potential.
- Starting herbs from seed can keep costs down. A single packet of seeds can provide many plants for less money than the price of a single plant. Use the information on your seed packets for help with how deep to plant seeds, how long they take to germinate, and how big the plants get.
- Check out your local library to see if they have a seed library where you can pick up free seeds.
- Herbs like basil, cilantro, dill, parsley and green onions are easy to grow from seed. Herbs that like to live outside year-round, like rosemary, thyme, oregano and sage, can be more challenging to start from seed.

Your county extension office's [Master Gardener helpline](#) is a helpful resource if you have questions about how or what to grow!

# Net Worth: A Year-End Financial Check-Up

Barbara O'Neill, Ph.D., CFP®, AFC®, *Distinguished Professor and Financial Management Specialist Emeritus, Rutgers Cooperative Extension*



Thinking about doing a year-end financial check-up? A net worth statement (a.k.a., balance sheet) provides a “snapshot” of an individual’s or a household’s finances with a dollar value of what they own (assets) and owe (debts) at a given point in time.

Net worth is the dollar amount you would have if all your assets were sold today for their current market value and all your debts were paid in full. This relationship can be stated as:  $\text{Assets} - \text{Liabilities} = \text{Net Worth}$ . For example, if assets total \$750,000 and \$400,000 is owed (e.g., mortgage, credit cards, loans), net worth is \$350,000. Net worth can be a positive or negative number.

To be clear, net worth can be calculated on any day of the year. However, many people like to do this calculation at year-end to monitor their annual financial progress. Changes in net worth will reflect savings deposits and withdrawals, debt repayment, and gains or losses on savings and investments during the past year. Net worth can be computed using a “paper and pencil” [worksheet](#) and handheld calculator or with a computer spreadsheet.



## Below are six key things to know about net worth calculations:

- ◆ **Real World Uses** - Net worth calculations are not an “academic exercise.” Rather, net worth statements, or data contained within them, are required for many loan applications (especially home mortgages) and by attorneys and/or court systems during the divorce settlement process (e.g., to determine the division of marital property). Net worth is also a good starting point to determine if umbrella liability insurance might be needed.
- ◆ **Equity Analysis** - A net worth statement indicates home equity (value of home minus balance on a mortgage and/or home equity loan) at a glance. Ditto for equity in any other asset where loans are involved, such as a car. For example, if someone owes \$10,000 on a car that has lost value (depreciated) since it was driven off the dealer’s lot and is now worth \$8,000, the loan is “underwater” with -\$2,000 of negative equity.
- ◆ **Actual Cash Value** - Assets should be listed at their current value on the date a net worth statement is prepared. This will involve online access to bank, brokerage, and credit card accounts and other resources (e.g., Kelley Blue Book to find the value of vehicles). Personal possessions such as household goods, furniture, and electronics depreciate from the day of purchase and should be valued conservatively (e.g. 10% to 20% of original cost).
- ◆ **Life Insurance Value** - For life insurance, list only the amount that you could borrow today from a cash value policy (e.g., whole life, universal life, variable life). Term life insurance pays only if an insured person dies and, thus, has no value as an asset in a policyholder’s net worth statement. .
- ◆ **Real Estate Value** - Short of hiring a professional appraiser, homeowners can get a “ballpark” figure for the value of their home by requesting a complimentary market analysis of the value of their property from a local real estate agent and/or by actively monitoring local real estate listings, both online and in newspapers.
- ◆ **Types of Debt** - In the liabilities section of a net worth statement, list the dollar value of all debts, both long-term (e.g., student loans and a home mortgage) and short-term (e.g., credit card balances that will be paid in full next month or in a few payments). Ideally, debt balances should decline over time.



What does a net worth statement tell you? If liabilities exceed the value of assets (negative net worth), corrective action (e.g., credit counseling, debt consolidation, and even bankruptcy) may be needed... or simply more time for future income to be earned and savings to grow (e.g., new college graduates with student loan debt).

Conversely, net worth that is steadily increasing is a sign of financial wellness and should be celebrated. Take time this year- and every year- to calculate your net worth. It could surprise you!



## Building Your Strength and

### Easing Arthritis Pain - continued from page 1



improvements in muscle strength, reductions in systemic inflammation, pain, morning stiffness, and disease activity. Research also shows that functional training and resistance exercise are effective in improving various health metrics for patients with psoriatic arthritis.

For those new to strength training, it's important to start off slowly and build up gradually. Consulting a physician before beginning and considering a certified personal trainer can be beneficial. If possible, individuals may want to aim for at least two days a week of strength training. Starting with light weights or resistance bands, and gradually increasing the intensity, is the best way to guarantee safety and long-term success. Always including a warm-up and cool-down in the routine is ideal to prevent injuries. Simple activities like walking or gentle stretching are effective. Focus on low-impact, joint-friendly movements such as seated leg lifts, wall push-ups, and resistance band exercises. Altering exercises to assist joint limitations is crucial. Adjusting or modifying exercises to your comfort level is a best practice.

#### References:

- American Heart Association. American Heart Association Recommendations for Physical Activity in Adults and Kids. American Heart Association. Published January 19, 2024. <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/fitness/fitness-basics/aha-recs-for-physical-activity-in-adults>
- ACSM. ACSM Guidelines for Strength Training | Featured Download. Acsm.org. Published 2019. <https://www.acsm.org/blog-detail/acsm-certified-blog/2019/07/31/acsm-guidelines-for-strength-training-featured-download>
- Publishing HH. 5 weight training tips for people with arthritis. Harvard Health. Published February 3, 2021. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/5-weight-training-tips-for-people-with-arthritis>
- Best Exercises for Rheumatoid Arthritis | Arthritis Foundation. [www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org). <https://www.arthritis.org/health-wellness/healthy-living/physical-activity/other-activities/best-exercises-for-rheumatoid-arthritis>
- CDC. Physical Activity for Older Adults: An Overview. Physical Activity Basics. Published May 7, 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-basics/guidelines/older-adults.html>
- Fallon EA. Prevalence of Diagnosed Arthritis — United States, 2019–2021. *MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. 2023;72(41). doi: <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7241>

## Botanical Benefits: Growing your Own Herbs - continued from page 5



We can't forget the health benefits of including plants in our lives. Being around plants can help relieve stress. Researchers have associated indoor plants with decreased blood pressure and improved academic achievement. If you decide to transition your herb garden outside this spring, you may also harvest some health benefits. Gardening outdoors has been associated with improvements in multiple health outcomes including life satisfaction, mood, self-esteem, and likelihood of meeting physical activity guidelines.

#### Sources:

- Han, K. T., Ruan, L. W., & Liao, L. S. (2022). Effects of Indoor Plants on Human Functions: A Systematic Review with Meta-Analyses. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*, 19(12). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19127454>
- Petersen, K. S., Anderson, S., Chen See, J. R., Leister, J., Kris-Etherton, P. M., & Lamendella, R. (2022). Herbs and Spices Modulate Gut Bacterial Composition in Adults at Risk for CVD: Results of a Prespecified Exploratory Analysis from a Randomized, Crossover, Controlled-Feeding Study. *J Nutr*, 152(11), 2461-2470. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/nxac201>
- Soga, M., Gaston, K. J., & Yamaura, Y. (2017). Gardening is beneficial for health: A meta-analysis. *Prev Med Rep*, 5, 92-99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2016.11.007>
- United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. (2024). *Summary Findings: Food Price Outlook, 2024 and 2025*. Retrieved September 19, 2024 from: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/summary-findings/>

