

Cooperative Extension

Promoting Healthy Families, Schools and Communities

**Increased Opportunities
for Eating Together & Eating Well**

Sherri M. Cirignano, MS, RDN, LDN, FCHS Educator, Warren County



For many, the past few weeks have resulted in a lot of extra togetherness for families. Despite some inevitable challenges, there is no doubt that a generous portion of memories are being made. Some memories may have been made due to increased opportunities to eat together as a family. This is potentially a very positive outcome of this time of social distancing, especially for families with young children. There is some impressive data to back up the extra time and work involved with making meals together happen.

Studies have consistently shown that the children of families who eat together make more healthful food choices, are less likely to be overweight, do better in school and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as smoking and drinking alcohol. Other benefits include the increased amount of time for talking, listening and sharing.

This is also a perfect opportunity to not only eat together, but to eat well together. From an early age, children learn how and what to eat by watching others. At mealtime, parents and others are their models for healthy eating. And when families eat together, they tend to make healthful food choices. Research has shown that children ages 9–14 who participate in regular meals with their family consume more fruits and vegetables, less fried foods and sodas, and follow a more healthful diet overall. Teens can also benefit, being more likely to choose fruits, vegetables, and dairy products, and there’s an increase in the likelihood that they will get better grades in school.

The benefits of eating together are impressive! The key is to consistently make it happen. Consider setting aside a small amount of time each week to make a simple plan for a few meals together. Choose menus that are easy to prepare so that the focus remains on the family sharing time together. For example, on a busy day, the menu could be as quick as a frittata or omelet with veggies and a side salad, whole wheat pasta tossed with roasted vegetables, or a baked potato topped with steamed broccoli and other favorite toppings. “Breakfast” for dinner could also be a big hit. Prepare pancakes, French toast, or waffles topped with your favorite fresh fruits.

Use your imagination and be creative with meals, involving the whole family. This will not only enhance family togetherness, but will also promote the importance of each family member, and provide great opportunities to teach about nutrition, meal planning, and cooking. Depending on age and experience, children can help with everything from washing vegetables to putting the main dish in the oven, and even little ones can help set the table.

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Feeding Sick Family Members

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While the saying, “feed a cold and starve a fever”, has been around since the 16th century, it is not supported by scientific evidence. With so many myths circulating, it can be hard to know how to best feed sick family members. No matter the type of illness, however, the foods and fluids you fix for your loved ones can largely affect the symptoms that they feel and the speed with which they recover.

How important are fluids and on which ones should I focus?

- Because fluid needs often go up during illness, especially with fever, good hydration is critical.
- Rehydrate every 1 to 2 hours with fruit infused water, bone broth, herbal tea or decaf coffee.
- Don't forget you can get fluids from foods too; add water rich fruits and vegetables such as oranges, grapes, cucumbers, and tomatoes to the plate.

Are there specific foods or nutrients I should feed my sick family member?

- Serve small frequent meals that are nutrient dense when appetite is poor and steer clear of overly rich, greasy, and fried foods that can further upset the stomach.
- Protein needs rise during illness; amino acids are the building blocks of the immune system; try adding peanut butter or cottage cheese to oatmeal for an added boost at breakfast.
- Current evidence does not show that vitamin C supplementation is effective in treating cold or flu symptoms; however, vitamin C rich foods such as berries, kiwi, bell pepper and spinach can support a healthy immune system in the long run.
- Choose probiotic rich yogurt over pudding or jello as a soft food to feed a sick family member as it will help to restore beneficial gut bacteria and support overall immune health.

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- While more research is needed, zinc has been linked to reduced duration and severity of cold symptoms; “metallic-tasting” zinc lozenges may not be well received by a sick loved one, but you can offer zinc rich foods such as poultry, seafood, beans, nuts, and whole grains.

What about a comforting bowl of mom's chicken noodle soup?

- In addition to hydration, chicken noodle soup provides a good balance of electrolytes like sodium and potassium, as well as protein in chicken, and antioxidants in vegetables.
- Chicken noodle soup is also easy to swallow and doesn't require a lot of energy to eat.
- Enrich your broth with garlic and ginger for additional flavor; while their medicinal properties have not been proven in the scientific literature, they have been used for their antimicrobial and anti-nausea properties throughout history.

The food that you choose to serve your sick family members can help soothe their symptoms and get them back to good health. It's also important to remember that practicing basic food safety principles, such as cooking meat to its safe internal temperature, and maintaining good hygiene, such as handwashing, is essential to caring for a loved one when they are ill.

Setting Personal Finance Boundaries

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



One of the best ways to achieve personal goals is to set boundaries. In other words, draw a “line in the sand” and develop policies to say “no,” resist temptation, and stay on track. Boundaries can be set for many aspects of our lives including time use, spending and gifting money, eating habits, alcohol consumption, and ethics.

How do people set financial boundaries? Consider this analogy from the world of NASCAR Motor Sports. Ever since a car wreck nearly killed hundreds of spectators in the grandstands at Talladega in 1987, when a speeding car went airborne, races at Daytona International Speedway in Florida and Talladega Super Speedway in Alabama have required drivers to use “restrictor plates” to slow their cars down.

Like the Talladega racecars, many people also need “restrictors” (a.k.a., boundaries or “guardrails”) to slow themselves down so they can achieve their financial goals. In other words, cues to limit spending or reduce debt because they have “had enough.” Individuals need to develop, and enforce, their own personal finance boundaries. If someone tries to restrict another person, the “restricted” party will usually resent it and rebel.

Consider the following examples of personal finance restrictions:

- Spend no more than \$500 on holiday gifts and parties.
- Charge no more than \$200 per month on a credit card for new purchases.
- Spend no more than \$100 a week at the supermarket.
- Buy a “new used” car, instead of a new car, to reduce the cost.
- Deposit 5% of gross income in a 401(k) or 403(b) plan via payroll deduction (to “restrict” your income)



Need some more ideas to set boundaries? Consider the following:

- ✓ **Automate Your Finances-** Put systems in place to direct money toward your goals. Examples include automatic bill paying and checking-to-savings account transfers, automatic purchases of stock or mutual fund shares, and contributions to a tax-deferred employer retirement savings plan. Do not use automated saving or bill-paying, however, if you have a volatile income and need the flexibility to juggle expenses.
- ✓ **Set Personal Gifting Policies-** Decide how you will handle requests for money from siblings, parents, adult children, and others. Will you “just say no” or is there a maximum dollar amount that you would consider on a case-by-case basis? Ditto for requests to cosign a loan or other requests to “rescue” people financially. Next, develop a statement to use, when needed, that firmly and politely explains your boundaries to others.
- ✓ **Develop an Investment Policy Statement (IPS)-** Prepare this document alone or with a financial advisor to describe your investing “guardrails.” Items to include are your investment objective(s), risk tolerance, and the maximum percentage weight of your portfolio to hold in different asset classes (e.g., stocks and bonds).
- ✓ **Have an Accountability Partner-** Find someone you can share your financial goals and boundaries with. A good accountability partner will hold you accountable to keep your commitments and stay within your boundaries and encourage you to carry on when you slip up and need a “do over.”

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Finally, *enjoy* this special time with your family. Limit interruptions during the meal by turning off the TV and silencing phones. Keep the atmosphere positive and pleasant, encouraging opportunities for all members to share stories of the day. Avoid discussing negative issues that may promote a tense atmosphere. Maintaining a relaxed approach to mealtime together will go a long way in making memories and continuing a family tradition that everyone will look forward to.



The Mediterranean Diet:

Simple Changes Can Make a Difference

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What is the Mediterranean Diet?

The Mediterranean Diet mimics the dietary patterns of the countries and regions bordering the Mediterranean Sea – including Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Portugal and Crete. Although there is variance in which foods are traditional to each area, there are considerable overlaps which give rise to the Mediterranean Diet.

The Mediterranean Diet is plant-based with the core of the diet containing vegetables, fruits, olive oil, beans and legumes, nuts and seeds and whole grains. Adherence to the Mediterranean Diet places an indirect emphasis on the consumption of fiber, monounsaturated fats and a wide variety of vitamins and minerals while decreasing the consumption of processed foods, trans fats and red meat – making the health benefits related to long-term adherence vast.

How to Incorporate the Mediterranean Diet into Your Lifestyle

Adherence to the Mediterranean Diet is simple, requiring small but profound changes. Some helpful tips to incorporate the Mediterranean Diet into your daily life include:



1. Eat your veggies - vegetables are the focal point of the Mediterranean Diet, providing your body with a variety of important vitamins and minerals. Increase consumption by incorporating vegetables into every meal.



2. Switch to whole grains - whole grains are nutrient-dense, providing a variety of nutrients and helping to keep you feeling fuller longer. Traditional Mediterranean grains include bulgur, barley, farro and brown, black and red rice.



3. Use healthy fats - include sources of healthy fats in daily meals by incorporating extra-virgin olive oil, nuts, peanuts, sunflower seeds, olives and avocados into your diet.



4. Eat seafood twice a week - seafood is a great protein source filled with healthy fats and other important nutrients. Try to consume seafood such as tuna, salmon and shellfish at least twice per week.



5. Enjoy dairy products in moderation - when choosing dairy products, aim to consume low-fat and fat-free products. Incorporate these products into your diet by consuming low-fat Greek yogurt and low-fat milk and cheeses.



6. Meatless Mondays - since the Mediterranean Diet is plant-based it is important to consume vegetarian meals. A good way to start including more vegetarian meals into your diet is by participating in Meatless Mondays. Instead of animal protein, build meals around beans, whole grains and vegetables. With time, incorporate vegetarian meals into your diet on a more consistent basis.

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Be Active with your Family

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Physical Activity has many benefits from preventing chronic disease to improving our mood, reducing stress and even improving sleep. Yet many Americans fall short of daily exercise recommendations. The USDA recommends 60 minutes of daily activity for children and 150 minutes per week for adults. Parents who exercise set a good example for living a healthy style and exercising together teaches children to enjoy moving for a lifetime.

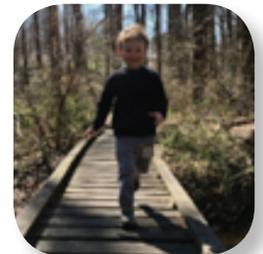
When it comes to exercising doing what you like is going to keep you moving. If you enjoy a peaceful walk, then make that your go to exercise. Biking, swimming and hiking are all good examples of other activities you might find fun that can help you stay fit. Including the family will benefit everyone.

According to an article in "BMC Public Health" owning a dog provides the owner on average 22 minutes more of walking time a day than a non-pet owner. If you have a dog make sure to take the kids along when you go for a walk and if you don't have a pet take a special friend like a favorite toy or teddy bear to increase your family's cardiovascular workout each day. Walking supports a healthy bone structure in both adults and children.



Many cities and towns have bike lanes. If you are unsure about how your children will do riding a bike in a congested area, test it out before you go. Riding bikes can produce aerobic exercise and children should participate in vigorous to intense aerobic activity three times a week meaning they are breathing hard and their hearts are pumping.

Hike in the woods or park. Tracking your walk is a fun way to stay motivated. If you go for a walk or hike use an app to track how far you went. When you get home have children record the distance you traveled. Set a goal to walk to your favorite place by calculating recorded distances. Tracking your daily distance gives you a goal and something fun to do together.



Many families have sidewalk chalk, jump ropes, hula hoops or balls lying around, combine these playtime favorites and use them to create an obstacle course. Use the obstacle course to add muscle building exercises with your body's own resistance, like pushups or planks. In addition to the 150 minutes of moderate to intense aerobic exercise Adults require each week they should have two days that include muscle strengthening activity.

Make an at home parade by grabbing some pots and pans and wooden spoons, add a few dance moves and make some good old fashion noise. Some talented marching bands add dance moves, add them into your parade or put some music on and dance. Music lifts spirits and moving to music is an added benefit.



No matter how you move it is important to find time each day to be active. Discover what is fun and take turns choosing an activity you all do together to create a lifetime of health for the entire family.

- Dall, P.M., Ellis, S.L.H., Ellis, B.M. et al. The influence of dog ownership on objective measures of free-living physical activity and sedentary behaviour in community-dwelling older adults: a longitudinal case-controlled study. *BMC Public Health* 17, 496 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-017-4422-5>
- "MyPlate" MyPlate, www.choosemyplate.gov/.
- "Walk. Run. Dance. Play. What's Your Move?" *MoveYourWay*, health.gov/moveyourway.

What is Portion Distortion?

Jennifer Shukaitis, MPH, Assistant Professor/FCHS Statewide Educator



As portion sizes of foods have increased in recent years, our understanding of food portions have become distorted. **Portion Distortion** is the tendency to assume that larger-than-necessary portion sizes are “normal.” This leads people to consume larger quantities of food and drink than is necessary to maintain good health.

Serving vs. Portion

Many people use the terms “portion” and “serving” interchangeably. However, they are not the same thing.

A **SERVING** is a standardized amount of a given food, such as the “serving size” that you see listed on the Nutrition Facts Label. A **PORTION** is the amount of food people choose to put on their plates and/or consume. **PORTIONS** may actually contain several **SERVINGS**. For example, the Nutrition Facts Label may identify one serving of cereal to be a half cup; however, if the **PORTION** that you pour into your bowl is actually one and a half cups, then your **PORTION** contains **THREE SERVINGS**. This means that the nutritional content will also triple: if one serving (0.5 cups) of cereal has 100 calories, then the portion with 1.5 cups will have 300 calories.

Serving size: 0.5 cups



Your portion: 1.5 cups



Why is this a problem?

An important part of healthful eating is choosing appropriate portions of a variety of foods. Excess calories add up easily; in fact, an increase of just 100 calories per day, compounded over the course of a year, can result in a 10-pound weight gain if not balanced out with exercise.



Obesity has become a major health problem in the United States over the past few decades – roughly the same time frame that portion distortion has been increasing. Portion distortion is a contributing factor to the obesity epidemic since it can lead people to consume many more calories than they intend to.

Where is portion distortion found?

Portion Distortion is common among foods everywhere; in fact, it may be difficult to find portions that are an appropriate size these days. Some examples include:

- ✓ **Restaurants:** Competition is fierce nowadays with more people eating out. One way that restaurants compete for business is by equating larger portions with better value.
- ✓ **Grocery Stores:** Packaging has grown 60% since 1980 on many food items in grocery stores, such as chips, pretzels and crackers. Like restaurants, stores want our business and advertise saving money when you buy larger sizes or quantities.
- ✓ **Our own kitchens and dining rooms:** In 1980, a dinner plate was 8 inches in diameter. Today, they are 10 or 12 inches. Bowls are also bigger and hold several more ounces than they did even 20 years ago. We tend to fill up our plate or bowl, regardless of size. So, larger plates and bowls tend to mean that we eat larger quantities without intending to do so.

How Can I control Portion Distortion?

Here are some quick tips:

- ✓ **Use smaller plates and bowls.** It will appear as if you are eating more.
- ✓ **Check food labels for serving size.** Make portion sizes closer to serving sizes.
- ✓ **Portion controlled packages:** instead of bringing an entire bag of pretzels with you when you are on the go, put some in a small baggie.
- ✓ **Be more active:** exercise can help balance calorie intake.



Raw Sprouts: Yay or Nay?

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Seeds naturally contain abundant nutrients, vitamins and minerals which enable plants to grow. All of these components become bioavailable during sprouting, making sprouts a potentially healthy ingredient to add to salads, shakes or other meals. Protein, fiber, Vitamin K, Vitamin C, zinc and iron are some of the compounds contained in sprouts which make them a healthy option.

Unfortunately, raw sprout outbreaks have been reported for the last three decades and have only decreased slightly as new control measures have been introduced. The main risk from sprouts arises during the seed germination process, when sprouts are soaked with warm water for 3-4 days creating the perfect conditions for seed germination, as well as, pathogen growth. If a single seed contains even a single pathogen cell, this cell can multiply and reach very high concentrations during seed germination. This happens when the pathogen cell feeds on the nutrients released by the seeds as part of their natural sprouting process. It is not known how most sprout seeds become contaminated, but there are many potential routes for seed contamination. Seeds that are to be used for making sprouts must be handled with a higher hygienic standard than seeds which will be planted to grow crops.



The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported at least 60 foodborne disease outbreaks linked to sprouts, leading to many illnesses, hospitalizations and deaths. The majority of these outbreaks were linked to alfalfa sprouts, and *Salmonella* was the most common pathogen identified, followed by pathogenic *E. coli* and *Listeria monocytogenes*. Symptoms associated with *Salmonella* food-poisoning can begin from 6 hours to 6 days after ingestion and include diarrhea, fever and stomach cramps. Illnesses from *E. coli* (STEC) can start from 1 to 10 days after consuming an infected product and they resemble the symptoms mentioned for *Salmonella*. Pathogenic *E. coli* infections can be more severe and even life-threatening with continuous vomiting and blood in the stools.



CDC reported three outbreaks linked to alfalfa sprouts in 2016 which affected a total of 73 people in 23 states which led to 17 hospitalizations. Another raw sprouts food-poisoning case in 2018 affected 10 people in 3 states. A 2020 outbreak linked to clover sprouts in six states has already been reported, with 39 cases and 2 hospitalizations.

The sprout industry, in collaboration with the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), has made efforts to prevent outbreaks. These include: pre-testing seed batches, using treatments to kill the pathogens without harming the seeds, and investing in outreach programs and a safety training curriculum. In spite of all these measures, sprouts can still pose a threat to consumers.

Current FDA recommendations state that while healthy individuals can choose to consume raw sprouts, pregnant women, infants and the elderly, as well as, immunocompromised individuals, should not eat raw sprouts. These individuals should only consume properly cooked sprouts.

For more information:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/reading-08-16/advice.html>
- <https://www.fda.gov/food/cfsan-constituent-updates/fda-issues-draft-guidance-reducing-food-safety-hazards-production-seed-sprouting>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/ecoli/ecoli-symptoms.html>

The Mediterranean Diet:

Simple Changes Can Make a Difference - continued from page 4

Pasta with spinach, garbanzos and raisins

By Mayo Clinic Staff

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/recipes/pasta-with-spinach-garbanzos-and-raisins/rcp-20049797>

Number of servings: Serves 6

Ingredients

- 8 ounces (about 3 cups) dry bow tie pasta
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1/2 of a 19 ounces can of garbanzos, rinsed and drained
- 1/2 cup unsalted chicken broth
- 1/2 cup golden raisins
- 4 cups fresh spinach, chopped
- 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
- Cracked black peppercorns, to taste

Directions:

- 1) Fill a large pot 3/4 full with water and bring to a boil. Add the pasta and cook until al dente (tender), 10 to 12 minutes, or according to the package directions. Drain the pasta thoroughly.
- 2) In a large skillet, heat the olive oil and garlic over medium heat. Add the garbanzos and vegetable broth. Stir until warmed through. Add the raisins and spinach. Heat just until spinach is wilted, about 3 minutes. Don't overcook.
- 3) Divide the pasta among the plates. Top each serving with 1/6 of the sauce, 1 teaspoon Parmesan cheese and peppercorns to taste. Serve immediately.



Nutritional analysis per serving

Serving size: About 2 1/2 cups

Total fat	7 g
Calories	283 calories
Protein	11 g
Cholesterol	1 mg
Total carbohydrate	44 g
Dietary fiber	6 g
Monounsaturated fat	4 g
Saturated fat	1 g
Sodium	130 mg
Total sugars	12 g