

DECEMBER 2013/JANUARY 2014

Walk Kansas

Coming March 16 – May 10



District Extension Agents:

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Mark your calendars for this fun, team oriented fitness program. More details to come in February's newsletter.

Radon Test Kits

January is both Kansas Radon Action Month and National Radon Action Month. Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas released in rock, soil, and water from the natural decay of uranium. While levels in outdoor air pose a relatively low threat to human health, radon can accumulate to dangerous levels inside buildings. You can't see, smell, or taste it, but an elevated radon level in your home may be affecting the health of your family.

The U.S. Surgeon General recommends that all homes in the U.S. be tested for radon. Winter is an excellent time to test your home. Testing for radon is easy to do. If your house has a radon problem, you can take steps to fix it to protect yourself and your family. You can find out if your home has an elevated radon level by conducting a simple test.

It's as easy as opening a package, placing a radon detector in a designated area, and, after a set number of days, sending the detector back to a lab for analysis. The lab will then inform you of your radon test results.

Radon test kits are available at the Salina or Minneapolis extension office for \$5.50.

A Thankful Heart is a Happy Heart



Researchers and therapists have identified at least eight needs that we must meet regularly if we are to feel happy, satisfied, and fulfilled.

- 1) **Develop a positive picture of ourselves.** Our picture of ourselves is like a puzzle made up of individual beliefs that we have developed over time. These beliefs are based upon our experiences and how we interpret these experiences in both positive and negative ways. Say three positive things about yourself when you wake up in the morning; this is a good way to start the day.
- 2) **Develop close real-love relationships.** Real-love relationships are kind, giving, unselfish, sharing, straightforward, and healthy. Counterfeit-love relationships tend to be unkind, taking, selfish, manipulative, and unhealthy. Knowing this can help us recognize healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- 3) **Feel like we belong.** To belong is to feel connected, to feel that we are an important part of a relationship. The people and relationships we perceive we belong to tend to have the most influence on us. Set up a home environment with many fun things to do so your children and their friends will want to “hang out.” This is a good way to promote belonging.
- 4) **Receive the respect of others and ourselves.** Self-respect and the respect of others are developed when we try to live according to what we truly value and believe. Families, culture, and religion tend to have a large influence on what we choose to value and believe.
- 5) **Feel worthwhile by developing a healthy self-esteem.** Self-esteem and feeling worthwhile can be defined as how we feel about how we see ourselves. If we want to change how we feel about ourselves, we need to identify the beliefs we have about ourselves, and work on changing those beliefs that are unhealthy. Make a list of your beliefs and help your children identify their beliefs about themselves.
- 6) **Feel competent.** We need to feel like we are good at things. Being involved in intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual activities that develop our talents and skills will help us feel like we are competent and capable. Promote your partner’s and children’s involvement in activities they excel in will also help them feel competent and capable.
- 7) **Experience growth.** Developing and fostering an attitude of lifelong learning is an important key to happiness. If we are bored or our children are bored, then we need to promote learning activities. When we are learning new things and gaining new skills, we tend to experience growth. Read good books, attend a class, practice a musical instrument, and exercise to stimulate your brain and body.
- 8) **Feel safe and secure.** Families and marriages as social institutions are designed to help us feel safe and secure in our relationships. If we feel safe and secure socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically in our couple and family relationships, then these relationships are healthy.

FDA Pursues Trans Fats

The Food and Drug administration (FDA) requires *trans* fat to be on Nutrition Facts labels. Even though many processed foods have had partially hydrogenated oils (PHOs) removed, there are many that still contain PHOs.

Further reduction of PHOs can prevent 7,000 deaths from heart disease each year. Therefore, the FDA is in preliminary determination that PHOs are no longer considered “generally recognized as safe.” This would change them to food additives subject to FDA approval. This could end artificial *trans* fat in foods.

Learn more at <http://1.usa.gov/19215IP>

Spend Down Your Flexible Spending Plan

The flexible spending plan is an employee benefit that allows employees to pay for medical expenses with pre-tax dollars. In the past, if you did not use the funds during the calendar year (or in some cases through March 15 of the following year if your employer allowed a grace period), you lost the funds remaining in the account.

The Treasury Department and IRS changed the rules so employers can allow people to carry over up to \$500 in their accounts from one year to the next. Companies can choose to make this change before the end of 2013, but they are not required to do it.

If your employer does not make the change by year-end, and doesn't offer a grace period to spend remaining funds into the new year, it is time to use the money in your account or lose it. Remember that you can no longer use flex funds to pay for over-the-counter medicines, such as aspirin or allergy medications, without a prescription. Funds can be used on contact lenses, dental expenses, and prescription drugs. For a list of what is allowed, see IRS Publication 502.

Request Your Credit Report



Request your free credit report for 2013 if you have not already done so. You can request your free report online, by phone or by mail. Visit www.AnnualCreditReport.com, call 1-877-322-8228, or fill out the Annual Credit Report Request form (found at <https://www.annualcreditreport.com/cra/requestformfinal.pdf>) and mail it to Annual Credit Report Request Service, P.O. Box 105281, Atlanta, GA 30348-5281. No matter how you request your report, you have the option to request all three reports at once or to order one report at a time. By requesting the reports separately, for example one every four months, you can monitor your credit more frequently throughout the year.

Because the information in your credit report is used to evaluate your applications for credit, insurance, employment, and renting a home, you should be sure the information is accurate and up-to-date. In addition, monitoring your credit is one of the best ways to spot identity theft. Check your credit report at least once a year to correct errors and detect unauthorized activity.



What are Aebleskivers?

With a fun name like this, they have to be good! Aebleskivers (or Ebleskivers) are a Danish type of pancake made in a special pan and are round. Typically served during the holidays, aebleskivers are served with powdered sugar, whipped cream, butter, maple syrup, or fruit preserves.



Aebleskiver batter is placed into half-spherical molds, then turned with skewers every 90 seconds until golden brown and round in shape.

History states that when the Vikings returned from battle, they use their dented helmets as aebleskiver pans over a hot fire.

Stick to Your Ribs



Looking for a breakfast that will keep you full until lunchtime? Give oatmeal a whirl.

Researchers gave 48 people a breakfast of either Quaker Old Fashioned Oatmeal or, on another day, Honey Nut Cheerios. Both breakfasts had 360 calories, including the 110 calories in about 1½ cups of fat-free milk.

After eating the oatmeal, the participants reported feeling less hungry over the next four hours than they did after eating the Cheerios.

That could be because the oatmeal had more beta-glucan—a viscous, gummy fiber – than the Cheerios.

What to do: If you want a breakfast that holds you until lunch, try oatmeal.

Five Numbers to Remember About Early Childhood



700 New Neural Connections Per Second – In the first few years of life, 700 new neural connections are formed every second. Neural connections are formed through the interaction of genes and a baby's environment and experiences.

18 Months – Differences in the size of children's vocabulary first appear at 18 months of age, based on whether they were born into a family with high education and income or low education and income.

90-100% Chance of Developmental Delays – Significant adversity impairs development in the first three years of life – and the more adversity a child faces, the greater the odds of a developmental delay.

3:1 Odds of Adult Heart Disease – Adults who recall having 7 or 8 serious adverse experiences in childhood are 3 times more likely to have cardiovascular disease as an adult.

\$4-\$9 in Returns – Providing young children with a healthy environment in which to learn and grow is not only good for their development - economists have also shown that high-quality early childhood programs bring impressive returns on investment to the public. For every \$1 invested in early learning, communities can expect to see a return between \$4-\$9!

Holiday Eating Secrets



The holidays are here and with the festivities there comes a lot of food to enjoy. Here's some interesting research findings on holiday eating.

- Each guest adds 35 calories to your own food intake.
- Enjoy holiday music? Those festive tunes can add 100 calories to your food intake.
- It's game time! Eating during the game adds another 140 calories.

Needless to say, it all adds up. And skipping meals prior to the big feast will only make you eat more. So try these tricks to minimize over-eating.

- Slow down! Put your fork down between bites.
- Nibble on holiday treats along with low-calorie foods.
- Don't feel obligated to eat every food. Save room for the special treats and avoid the mundane foods.
- Planning the menu? Fill half of the menu with low-calorie fruit and vegetables dishes.
- After eating, go take a walk! That will help burn off those extra bites.

Cookies with a Twist

There are thousands of cookie recipes in a variety of shapes, sizes, textures, and flavors. During the holidays, cookies are a special treat and everyone has a favorite. Let's see how a traditional chocolate chip cookie can be altered for a different look.

Chocolate chips come in special holiday shapes, colors, and flavors. Simply replace the regular chips with these fancy chips. Try adding some colored sprinkles or sugar for extra sparkle.

Try these tips from the book *CookWise* by Shirley O. Corriher:

For More Spread

- Use butter
- Increase liquid 1-2 tablespoons
- Increase sugar 1-2 tablespoons
- Warm cold ingredients to room temperature, don't refrigerate dough

For More Puff

- Use shortening
- Use cake flour
- Reduce sugar a couple tablespoons
- Use all baking powder
- Use cold ingredients or refrigerate dough

For More Tenderness

- Use cake flour

Add a few tablespoons fat or sugar

Holiday Party Disasters - Solved!

Holiday entertaining is fraught with potential disasters. But a cool head and the right products will keep a mini-crisis from becoming a major problem. Here are some quick and easy remedies from the American Cleaning Institute:

Disaster: Gravy on your new tablecloth.

Solution: if you can get to the stain while it's still wet, treat it with a stain removal wipe. Otherwise, pretreat it after dinner with a prewash stain remover. Launder in the hottest water that's safe for the fabric.

Disaster: Lots of guests leave the bathroom smelling less than fresh.

Solution: Take a multi task approach: toilet bowl cleaners in tablet or gel form for quick cleaning and fabric refreshers for bathroom window treatments.

Disaster: A mid-party spot on your favorite outfit.

Solution: If the garment is washable, as soon as the party's over, treat the spot with a stain removal stick. This puts the stain "on hold" and buys you up to a week until you can tackle the laundry. If the garment is dry-clean-only, take it to the drycleaner as soon as possible and let them know the cause of the stain.

Disaster: Germs just love to mingle at a party, spreading illness wherever they can.

Solution: Use disinfectant wipes to quick-clean countertops and food preparation surfaces. Keep them next to bathroom and kitchen sinks for easy use. Be sure there is soap at every sink. Replace cloth hand towels with pretty paper ones so germs get tossed in the wastebasket. And put hand wipes right next to the tissue box!

Disaster: Cigarette smoke and cooking odors linger long after the guests have left.

Solution: Open up the windows and let the fresh air in. Then spray fabric refresher on window treatments, upholstery, rugs and carpets.

Disaster: Red wine spilled on your sofa.

Solution: Gently blot up any liquid. Don't scrub or rub the spot. As soon as possible after the party, use an upholstery cleaner on the spot. Read and follow the directions before using.

Health Tips



Taking a breather

Deep-breathing exercises can help maximize oxygen exchange, facilitate relaxation and reduce stress. They can also act on the centers in your brain that lower blood pressure.

The following exercise can help get you started:

- *Get comfortable* – Wear clothes that are loose at the waist, and either lie on your back or sit comfortably in a chair with your feet resting on the floor.
- *Take position* -- If lying down, rest one hand on your chest. If sitting, place your feet flat on the floor, relax your shoulders and put your hands in your lap.
- *Basic breathing to start* – Inhale through your nose, as this filters and warms the air. Exhale through your mouth. Concentrate on your normal breathing for a few minutes.
- *Inhale deeply* – Inhale while slowly counting to four or for about four seconds. Expand your abdomen slightly as you inhale. As you breathe in, imagine the air flowing to all parts of your body, supplying you with cleansing, energizing oxygen.
- *Exhale slowly* – you may wish to hold the air in your lungs for a few seconds. Next, exhale to a count of four, as your abdomen contracts. Imagine tension flowing out of you along with the exhaled breath.
- *Repeat* – Pause for a moment. Repeat this exercise for one to two minutes until you feel calm. If you experience lightheadedness, shorten the length and depth of your breathing.



Planning for Tax Time



Being organized and planning ahead can save time, money, and headaches at tax time. Start gathering your records and exploring your options now. You'll have more time when you're not facing a deadline or anxious for your refund.

Each household's financial circumstances are different, so it's important to fully consider your specific situation and goals before making large financial decisions. And remember, even some legitimate returns may require additional review and take longer to process, so don't count on getting your refund by a certain date to pay for something important.

For moderate and low-income individuals and families (generally \$55,000 and below), there are several options for free tax preparation

- E-file with Free File is an option available to most taxpayers with income less than \$58,000. It's available at IRS.gov where a number of tax software companies make their products available for free for those wanting to prepare their return themselves.
- The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program offers free tax preparation for low-to-moderate -income taxpayers. The site in Salina will be open January 28 – April 15 on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at the Volunteer Connection. Dates will also be scheduled in Minneapolis. To find a VITA site in another location, visit www.irs.gov, type the word VITA in the search engine and click on "Free tax return preparation for you by volunteers."
- Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) offers priority assistance to people who are 60 years of age and older. This service is available in Salina at the Sr. Center at 9th and Elm. To find other locations, visit the AARP locator at <http://bit.ly/1eR0FdY>.

IRS Certified Volunteers are available at both VITA and TCE sites to prepare your income taxes at no charge. More details coming in the next newsletter.

Don't Forget to Claim the Lifetime Learning Credit

This credit is commonly known to help pay for college courses— including courses to improve job skills—but can also be claimed for college classes taken by high schoolers. The credit can be claimed regardless of the number of years in the program.

Did you know...Expenses paid on behalf of the student by someone other than the student (such as a relative) are treated as paid by the student. However, if the student is a dependent the expenses are treated as paid by the taxpayer.

Basic requirements:

- The high school student must be claimed as a dependent on the taxpayer's return.
- Eligible institutions include any accredited school. A searchable database is available at <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/>.
- Qualifying expenses are tuition and certain expenses required to be paid to the institution as a condition of enrollment.
- The taxpayer cannot be married filing separately.

Medicare Premiums & Copays in 2014

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services have announced Medicare premium and copay amounts for 2014. The Part B premium remains unchanged for next year. Most people will continue to pay \$104.90 per month for their premium. Premium amounts also remain unchanged for those who pay a Part B income-related monthly adjustment amount.

Most beneficiaries do not pay a Part A premium. For those who do, the rates increase slightly for 2014 to \$426 per month for people with less than 30 work credits, and \$234 per month for those with 30 – 39 credits. The part B deductible also remains the same at \$147 per year. The Part A hospitalization deductible increases from \$1,184 per benefit period to \$1,216.

Knowledge at Noon

Let's Live a Little:

Physical Activity for Fun and Fitness

Date: Wednesday, January 8th

Time: 12:10-1 p.m.

Place: Room 109, City-County Building
300 W. Ash, Salina

Date: Friday, January 10th

Time: 10:30-11:30 a.m.

Place: Golden Wheel Senior Center,
114 South Concord Street, Minneapolis

Stepping Stones for Stepfamilies

Date: Friday, February 7th

Time: 10:30-11:30 a.m.

Place: Golden Wheel Senior Center
114 South Concord Street, Minneapolis

Date: Tuesday, February 25th

Time: 12:10 – 1 p.m.

Place: Room 109, City-County Building
300 W. Ash, Salina

Strong People Returns Spring 2014

Many of you have been eagerly waiting for the next session of Strong People. The wait is almost over. Strong People will be March 4th – May 8th at the Salina Senior Center. **Note:** We will exercise at a **NEW** time. Class will be held from 9:45 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

More details regarding registration will be provided in the February newsletter.



'Like' us on Facebook at

<https://www.facebook.com/CentralKansasDistrict>



Family Game Time
the second Friday of
every month
4-5:30 p.m.
Youth Services
Salina Public Library

Children must bring their grown ups. Spend a fun and relaxed evening playing and connecting with each other and with other families in the community.



CALENDAR

DECEMBER

- 13 Bonding Thru Board Games, Salina Public Library, 4-5:30 p.m.
- 24-25 Minneapolis Office Closed
- 24-31 Salina Office Closed
- 31 Minneapolis Office Closed, Noon-5 p.m.

JANUARY

- 1 Minneapolis and Salina Offices Closed
- 8 Knowledge at Noon, City-Co. bldg., Rm 109, Salina, 12:10-1 p.m.
- 10 Knowledge at Noon, Golden Wheel Senior Center, Minneapolis, 10:30-11:30 a.m.
- 10 Bonding Thru Board Games, Salina Public Library, 4-5:30 p.m.

FEBRUARY

- 7 Knowledge at Noon, Golden Wheels Senior Center, Minneapolis, 10:30-11:30 a.m.
- 14 Bonding Thru Board Games, Salina Public Library, 4-5:30 p.m.
- 25 Knowledge at Noon, City-Co. bldg., Rm 109, Salina, 12:10-1 p.m.