

Lubbock County Family Network



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February / March 2015

Attention! New Office Phone and Fax Numbers

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From Bitter to Sweet: Is Chocolate a Functional Food?

While the Cacao Tree is Native to tropical Americans, most of the world's supply comes from West Africa. Some people say there are four food groups (of chocolate): milk chocolate, dark chocolate, white chocolate and chocolate truffle. The Aztecs and Myans considered it the food of the gods or that it had medicinal properties and was used as a form of currency.

The question is whether it is a health food or junk food. It starts as a somewhat healthful, but stimulating food. It is rich in phenylethylamine, a substance our brain makes when we fall in love, hence the reason it is so popular at Valentines! The caffeine serves to stimulate our brain and body. There is about 30 mg of caffeine in an average chocolate bar where as a cup of brewed coffee has 100 to 150 mg. Chocolate is rich in magnesium but also in oxalic acid which can inhibit calcium and other mineral absorption if consumed in large amounts. It has phytochemicals or nutroceuticals such as catechins and flavanoids which can provide health benefits. Some of these benefits include reduction of free radicals produced by oxidation, lower LDL cholesterol, reduce blood pressure, and reduced platelet aggregation. However, the fat and sugar content does increase calories. Low dietary magnesium may be a factor in hypertension, stroke and cardiac arrhythmias.

A serving of milk chocolate (44 gm) provides 8% of the RDA and dark chocolate provides 15% of the RDA for magnesium. Milk chocolate products contribute some calcium to the diet.

Mix up one of these easy chocolate desserts for Valentines!

Devilish Chocolate Trifle

- 1 box (18 ozs.) devil's food cake mix
- ¼ to ½ cup rum or 1 to 2 teaspoons rum extract, (optional)
- 1 can (21 ozs.) cherry pie filling
- 1 pkg. (3.5 ozs.) instant chocolate pudding mix
- 1 ½ cups milk
- 1 carton (8 ozs.) whipped topping, divided
- ¼ cup toasted, sliced almonds

Prepare cake mix as directed on package. Divide batter and bake in two greased and floured 8-inch square pans. Bake for time indicated on box. Cut or cube one cake into slices or cubes. Use second cake for another trifle or frost and serve later. Place half of the cake slices in a 3-quart glass bowl or trifle dish. Sprinkle with 2 to 4 tablespoons rum, if desired. If rum extract is used, stir it into the cherry pie filling. Combine pudding mix and milk, beating until thickened. Fold in 1 cup of whipped topping. Spoon half of cherry pie filling over cake. Spoon pudding over pie filling. Repeat. Top with remaining whipped topping. Sprinkle with almonds. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

Easy Chocolate Dessert

- 1 pkg. (9 ozs.) chocolate cake mix
- 1 pkg. (8 ozs.) cream cheese, softened
- 2 cups milk
- 1 carton (8 ozs.) frozen whipped topping
- ¼ to ½ cup chopped nuts or slivered almonds
- 1 pkg. (4 ozs.) instant chocolate pudding

Prepare cake mix according to package directions; pour into a greased and floured 13x9x2-inch pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 15 minutes or until cake tests done; let cool in pan. (If using a regular size cake mix, use half the batter for the above and the remainder to make a dozen cupcakes or one 8-inch cake). Beat cream cheese; gradually add 1 cup milk, beating constantly.

Add pudding mix and remaining 1 cup milk, beating constantly. Add pudding mix and remaining 1 cup milk; beat until smooth and thickened. Spread evenly on cake. Spread whipped topping over the pudding layer; sprinkle with nuts. Refrigerate and serve well chilled. Makes 15 servings. (All mixing can be done with either a food processor, mixer, or blender). Garnish with fresh sliced or whole strawberries or chocolate curls.

Source: University of Nebraska at Lincoln Extension Leader Guide HEF598; Southwestern Public Service Co Thirty Years of Festive Foods; Nutrition Village: Can Food Alter Your Mood by Deborah Kaston, MPH; The Mayo Clinic: The Real Story Behind Chocolate Cravings.

Wishing You a Health H-A-P-P-Y N-E-W Y-E-A-R!

H-ealth

“The first wealth is health,” (Source: Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Make a health a priority this year. Health should be more than the absence of disease— read on for ideas.

A-ttitude

“Health and cheerfulness naturally beget each other.” (Source: Joseph Addison)

A positive attitude may not cure a disease. However, thinking positive can help you deal with misfortune, make the most of your situation and enjoy life more.

P-hysical activity

“A man’s health can be judged by which he takes two at a time – pills or stairs.” (Source: Joan Welsh)

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommends for adults: “Most health benefits occur with a least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of moderate intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking. Additional benefits occur with more physical activity. Both aerobic (endurance) and muscle-strengthening (resistance) physical activity are beneficial.”



P-eople

“Love cures people – both the ones who give it and the ones who receive it...” (Source: Dr. Karl Menninger)

Numerous studies indicate social networks, whether formal (such as a church or social club) or informal (such as meeting with friends, make people less vulnerable to ill health and premature death. Be wary, however, of social support that drains you through people being too demanding or encouraging you to engage in harmful behaviors.

Y-our body

“Take care of your body. It’s the only place you have to live.” (Source Jim Rohn)

Schedule physical checkups as needed: eyes, teeth, mammogram, colonoscopy, general physical, etc.

N-o!

“Half of the troubles of this life can be traced to saying yes too quickly and not saying no soon enough.” (Source: Josh Billings)

Rather than adding “take a time management class” to your “to do” list, consider starting a “don’t do” list.

You may discover doing LESS can bring MORE enjoyment to your life. Especially if doing less allows you to spend time doing more to contribute to your health and happiness and that of family and friends!

E-at healthy

“Rich, fatty foods are like destiny: they too, shape our ends.” (Source: Arthur Unknown)

ChooseMyPlate.gov recommends: “Calories are the fuel you need to work and play. You even need calories to rest and sleep! Foods and beverages vary in how many calories and nutrients they contain. When choosing what to eat and drink, it’s important to get the right mix – enough nutrients, but not too many calories.”



For more information on planning healthy menus, visit www.ChooseMyPlate.gov.

W-isdome

“A wise man makes his own decisions, an ignorant man follows public opinion.” (Source: Chinese Proverb)

Take time to listen to your own body. Rather than set your goals based on how fast other people walk or jog, how little sleep others can get by on or how much someone else eats, concentrate on what makes YOU healthy.

Y-our hands

“Keeping hands clean is one of the most important ways to prevent the spread of infection and illness.” (Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Here is how to wash your hands from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

When washing your hands with soap and water:

- **Wet** your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.
- **Lather** your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers and under your nails.
- **Scrub** your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the “Happy Birthday” song from beginning to end twice.
- **Rinse** your hands well under clean, running water. Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.



E-nough sleep

“A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor’s book.” (Source: Irish Proverb)

According to a December, 2013 Gallup Poll, 43% of Americans say they would feel better if they got more sleep.



“Insufficient sleep is a public health epidemic,” according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Insufficient sleep is linked to motor vehicle crashes, industrial disaster, medical and other occupational disorders. People who do not get enough sleep also are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, depression and obesity, as well as from cancer.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offers these tips to help you get a good night’s sleep:

- Follow a regular sleep schedule. Go to sleep and get up at the same time each day, even on weekends. Try to avoid napping in the late afternoon or evening, as it may keep you awake at night.
- Develop a bedtime routine. Take time to relax before bedtime each night. Some people watch television, read a book, listen to soothing music or soak in a warm bath.
- Keep your bedroom dark, not too hot or too cold and as quiet as possible.
- Have a comfortable mattress, a pillow you like, and enough blankets for the season.
- Exercise at regular times each day but not within 3 hours of your bedtime.
- Make an effort to get outside in the sunlight each day.
- Be careful about when and how much you eat. Large meals close to bedtime may keep you awake, but a light snack in the evening can help you get a good night’s sleep.

- Stay away from caffeine late in the day. Caffeine (found in coffee, tea, soda and hot chocolate) can keep you awake.
- Drink fewer beverages in the evening. Waking up to go to the bathroom and turning on a bright light break up your sleep.
- Remember alcohol will not help you sleep. Even small amounts make it harder to stay asleep.
- Use your bedroom only for sleeping. After turning off the light, give yourself about 20 minutes to fall asleep. If you are still awake and not drowsy, get out of bed. When you feel sleepy, go back to bed.

A-void portion distortion

“Never eat more than you can lift.” (Source: Miss Piggy, muppet character)

Rather than worry so much about “what” you eat, consider “how much” you eat. Downsize your portion sizes. Serve food on smaller plates. Eat from plates and bowls rather than packages and bags, so you see how much you are eating.

R-eading materials

“Be careful about reading health books. You may die of a misprint.” (Source: Mark Twain)

Consider the source before starting a new drastic diet or exercise plan. Beware of plans that:

- Promise quick, dramatic results.
- Charge large fees for consultations, equipment, supplements, etc.
- Rely solely on testimonials and statements from “professionals” with unusual-sounding degrees.

Source: Alice Henneman, MS, RDN, Extension Education, Nebraska Extension

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Fast Food with Slow Cookers

Imagine coming home at the end of the day with a great tasting meal already prepared and waiting for you. Does this sound too good to be true? Not if you have a slow cooker. Slow cookers can help busy people prepare meals on a budget, saving both money and time. If you are new to slow cooker cooking or want to get re-acquainted with one you already have, then the following information is just for you!

Testing Your Slow Cooker for Accuracy

If your slow cooker has been in the back of a cabinet for a while, test it for accuracy before you use it.

Here is a simple way to test your slow cooker:

1. Fill the slow cooker ½ to ¾ full with water.

2. Turn the slow cooker on to LOW and let heat for 8 hours. Do not lift the lid during this time!
3. Check the water temperature with an accurate food thermometer. Do this quickly since the temperature in the slow cooker drops 10 to 15 degrees once the lid is removed.
4. The temperature of the water should be between 185 and 200 degrees.
7. Fill the cooker between ½ and ⅔ full. Vegetables such as potatoes and carrots cook slower than meat and poultry so place them at the bottom of the cooker. Be sure the liquid almost covers the ingredients so there is proper heat transfer throughout the crock. The liquid is needed to generate the steam that cooks the food.

If the water temperature is less than 185 degrees, the slow cooker is not safe to use and should be replaced. If the temperature is over 200 degrees, then it is likely that food cooked in the slow cooker for 8 hours without any stirring will be overdone.

Tips for Safe and Successful Slow Cooking

1. Start with a clean cooker, utensils and work area. Wash hands before and during food preparation, especially after handling raw meat and poultry.
2. Spray the inside of the crock with non-stick cooking spray before adding ingredients to keep the food from sticking. This makes cleaning the crock easier. Plastic crock liner bags also can help clean-up.
3. Prepare foods that have high moisture content like as chili, soup, or spaghetti sauce. When using a commercially prepared frozen slow cooker meal, follow the instructions on the package.
4. Keep perishable foods refrigerated until preparation time. Meat and vegetables should be stored separately in the refrigerator in covered containers. It takes time for slow cookers to reach a temperature hot enough to kill bacteria so keeping these food refrigerated helps ensure that bacteria, which multiply fast at room temperature, don't get a head start during the first few hours of cooking.
5. Always thaw meat or poultry before putting it into a slow cooker. **Never put frozen meat or chicken in a slow cooker.**
6. Depending on the age of the slow cooker, the size of meat or poultry you cook in the slow cooker matters. Until recently, placing a whole roast or chicken in a slow cooker was not recommended. New research conducted by USDA FSIS suggest that **for newer models**, it is safe to cook large cuts of meat and poultry in a slow cooker. The newer models of slow cookers are larger and more powerful than the older ones, so it is safe to cook larger pieces of meat and poultry. If you have an older model, continue to cut your meat or poultry into smaller pieces before cooking.
8. Keep the lid on the slow cooker during the cooking process. Remove **only** to stir the food or check for doneness. Each time the lid is raised, the internal temperature drops 10-15 degrees and the cooking process is slowed by 20 to 30 minutes.
9. Use a food thermometer to make sure foods have been cooked to a safe internal temperature. Recommended temperatures are: poultry (165 degrees), ground beef (160 degrees), beef steaks and roasts (145 degrees) and pork (160 degrees).
10. Store foods cooked in the slow cooker in shallow, covered containers and refrigerate within two hours of cooking. Reheat foods to 165 degrees using an oven, microwave, or stove top. Soups, stews and gravies should be brought to a rolling boil before eating.
11. If you are not home during the **entire** slow-cooking process and the power goes out, throw out the food - even if it looks done! If you are home when the power goes off, finish cooking the ingredients immediately by some other means: on a gas stove, on an outdoor grill, or even at another house where there is power. If this is not possible, throw out the food.

If you are home when the power goes off and **if** the food was already completely cooked, the food should remain safe for up to two hours in the cooker with the power off.

Expert Says Aging and Exercise Should Go Hand in Hand.

Being physically active can allow people to do the things they enjoy, stay independent as they age and produce long-term health benefits.

Regular exercise and physical activity are important to the physical and mental health of most everyone, including older adults.

Health experts agree that older adults should be active every day to maintain optimal health.

Physical activities get the body moving, and can be anything from gardening, walking and/or taking the stairs instead of the elevator. Exercise is a form of physical activity that is specifically planned or structured, such as weight training or an aerobics class.

Physical activity may be especially helpful to older adults. In addition to helping mood and increasing social interaction, it may help prevent, delay or improve conditions such as diabetes and heart disease. Physical activity also helps strengthen muscles and bones which have a tendency to weaken as the body ages.

One of the great things about physical activity is that there are so many ways to be active. For example, you can be active in short spurts throughout the day, or you can set aside specific times of the day on specific days of the week to exercise. Many physical activities are free or low cost and do not require special equipment.

The National Institute on Aging recommends the following when considering exercise and/or physical activity:

- Stretch. Before starting any exercise and after completing any exercise, stretch. This will help loosen and warm muscles in addition to helping prevent injury and cramping. It is also important to remember the body needs plenty of water, especially after exercising.
- 30 minutes. Do something to increase the heart and breathing rate for at least 30 minutes most days of the week. The 30 minutes do not have to be all at once; it could be three 10-minute exercises. A good rule of thumb to see if it is enough is to try to talk during exercise. If you cannot talk at all, you are exercising too hard; if you can talk without any trouble, you are not exercising hard enough.
- Use the muscles. Every movement uses a muscle. When those muscles are not used because of a lack of physical activity they weaken. Weak muscles may create an inability to walk or get up from a seated position. Strong muscles help reinforce bones, making falls less likely.
- Improve balance. In addition to strengthening muscles, strengthening sense of balance is important. To do this, try standing on one foot, holding onto a chair for support if unable to do this task alone. Also, try standing from a seated position without using hands or arms. Be very careful when trying these activities and have someone else present.

Your health provider will be a key player in your exercise routine. Please remember to consult him or her before beginning any type of physical activity. You will want to discuss how your personal health condition may be affected by exercise. Also, you will want to start slowly with any type of exercise routine.

A good guideline to remember is “start low and go slow.” Doing too much, too soon may cause serious injury.

Some safety recommendations from the American College of Sports Medicine include:

- Do not hold your breath while straining.
- Use safety equipment to prevent injury. This may mean a helmet for bike riding or proper shoes for walking or running.
- Drink plenty of liquids unless specifically advised otherwise by your health provider.
- Bend from the hips, not from the waist.

Exercise may cause soreness or a little discomfort but should never cause pain.

The National Institute of Aging publication “Exercise & Physical Activity: Your Everyday Guide” has information on exercise for older adults as well as suggestions and illustrations for exercises.

The publication can be found at

<http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/exercise-physical-activity/introduction>

or in Spanish at:

<http://www.nia.nih.gov/espanol/publicaciones/ejercicio-actividad-fisica>

Source: Andrew Crocker, 806-677-5600, abcrocker@ag.tamu.edu

The Truth about Agave Nectar: Safe for Persons with Diabetes?

Is agave nectar (also known as agave syrup) a safe alternative to table sugar for persons with diabetes? This question has been a recent topic of debate for health professionals. The facts about agave nectar are as follows:

1. Agave nectar is a natural *nutritive sweetener*, meaning it is not calorie-free like some other non-nutritive sweeteners.
 - Each tablespoon of agave nectar contains approximately 16 grams of carbohydrates and 64 calories. Many persons with diabetes control their blood glucose by counting carbohydrates using meal exchanges. One “exchange” or “carbohydrate choice” is equal to 15 grams of carbohydrates; therefore, 1 tablespoon (or 3 teaspoons) of agave nectar is equal to 1 carbohydrate choice.
 - On food labels, sugar is not always identified by the word *sugar*; it has many disguises. It can be called sucrose, fructose, corn syrup, dextrin, polyols (sugar alcohols such as xylitol, sorbitol, etc.) and many other names. All of these different nutritive sweeteners contribute about the same number of calories per gram.

2. The glycemic index (a measure of the effect that foods have on blood sugar levels) of agave nectar is lower than other nutritive sweeteners.
 - Agave nectar will not raise blood sugar levels as rapidly as table sugar. However, it *will* still raise blood sugar levels. It should be used in moderation.
3. The primary sweetening agent in agave nectar is fructose, which has the same number of calories as table sugar, but tastes sweeter.
 - Agave nectar is 90% fructose and 10% glucose (fructose and glucose are carbohydrates). Fructose tastes sweeter than table sugar. Because of this, less agave nectar can be used to make food just as sweet as table sugar does. Recipes that call for table sugar can be modified by using agave nectar, but a smaller amount would need to be used. Also, some of the liquid in the recipe would need to be left out due to the liquid nature of agave nectar.

4. Agave nectar has minimal antioxidant activity.
 - Natural, unrefined sweeteners are thought to have high levels of antioxidant activity. Antioxidants are protective against many chronic diseases. However, very minimal antioxidant activity has been found in agave nectar.
5. The American Botanical Council recommends that pregnant women do not use agave nectar, but has found it safe for use in the general public.

The consensus among health professionals is that agave nectar should be treated like a sugar for persons with diabetes. If agave nectar is chosen as a sweetener by persons with diabetes, it should count as a carbohydrate choice in a meal: 1 tablespoon \approx 15 grams carbohydrate = 1 carbohydrate choice. Agave nectar is safe to enjoy in moderation!

References

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Source: Prepared by Jennifer Hutchinson, BA, Texas A&M University Dietetic Intern and Mary Kinney Bielamowicz, PhD, RD, LD, Regents Fellow, Professor and Nutrition Specialist, Department of Nutrition and Food Science, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Texas A&M University System, Spring 2011.

Recipe Corner



Spaghetti with Meat Sauce (Makes about 7 cups of sauce)

- 1 pound lean ground beef
 1 clove garlic, minced
 2 14.5 ounce cans Italian-style chopped tomatoes
 1 8-ounce can tomato sauce
 1 12-ounce can tomato paste
 1 cup water
 Cooked spaghetti
1. Wash hands; make sure the slow cooker, cooking utensils and counter tops are clean.
 2. Brown meat in saucepan; drain excess fat.
 3. Place meat in the slow cooker; add remaining ingredients. Stir to mix ingredients.
 4. Cover slow cooker and cook on low for 8 hours.
 5. Serve over cooked, hot spaghetti.

Vegetable Soup (Makes 8 cups)

- 2 14.5-ounce cans of chicken broth (fat free)
 1 1-pound package of frozen mixed vegetables
 1 14.5-ounce can diced tomatoes
 1 medium potato (peeled and diced)
 1 small onion (chopped)
 1-2 tablespoons dried celery (optional)
 Salt and pepper to taste
1. Wash hands, make sure the slow cooker, cooking utensils and counter tops are clean.
 2. Place all ingredients in the slow cooker.
 3. Cover and cook on LOW for 7 to 8 hours.

Sincerely,

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