

# Family and Consumer Sciences “Top Health & Wellness” Newsletter in Tom Green County

TEXAS A&M  
**AGRI LIFE**  
EXTENSION

Volume 34 Issue 2

February 2017

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## *Best Bit*

The average U.S. consumer spent \$116.21 on Valentine’s Day gifts last year, according to Statistic Brain. That’s a high price for the standard overindulgent items such as candy, chocolates or restaurant meals. This year, try something new and healthier: Give your special someone fitness gear for a favorite sport, a spa kit for relaxing at home, or a colorful fruit basket.



## *Weighty Matters*

**Carrying around pounds of excess body fat is a heavy burden on many levels.** Being obese increases the risk for all leading causes of death (including diabetes, heart attack, stroke and cancer) as well as other chronic health conditions and poor mental health.

**Obesity is epidemic in the U.S.** Primary causes are eating too much and moving too little. Our jobs are primarily sedentary, everyday conveniences allow us to walk less, and we prefer our leisure on the couch. Adding to the equation, we often fill up on easily available cheap fast food and snacks.

**If you’re struggling with a serious weight problem, you’re not alone** — more than a third of U.S. adults are obese. Keep in mind, losing as little as 5% to 10% of your body weight offers significant health improvement, even if you never achieve your ideal weight.

**First step: Review your health habits and history** with your health care provider to learn which behaviors, related illnesses or physical or psychological factors are causing weight gain or making weight loss difficult.



**Second step: Walk it off.** Burning a hundred or so calories per mile might not seem like much, but it can inspire better weight control and confidence that you can feel well again. Try to fit in a walk every day.



## Hypertension: High Risk for Type 2 Diabetes

**High blood pressure (hypertension) is a major risk factor for developing type 2 diabetes.** Once you're diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, controlling both your blood sugar and blood pressure (BP) levels is essential to avoiding serious health complications.

With high BP, your blood is pumping through your heart and blood vessels with elevated force. Over time, hypertension weakens your heart muscle, leaving it vulnerable to serious problems. The recommended BP level for people with type 2 is under 130/80.

**The combination of hypertension and type 2** is especially damaging and can significantly raise the risk of having a heart attack or stroke. Hypertension can accelerate the progression of diabetes; even a mild rise in BP can quickly worsen kidney disease, a common risk with diabetes.

**To keep your blood pressure healthy:** Lose excess weight, get regular exercise and stop using tobacco and alcohol — all things that can also help prevent or treat type 2 diabetes. If you already have both conditions, you may need more than 1 medication to improve your numbers — discuss all options with your health care provider.



## QuikRisk™ Assessment: What Do You Do for Your Heart?



February is American Heart Month.

**One hundred years ago, heart disease was much less common** and most physicians never treated it because people died from other causes and didn't live as long as we do now. Today, however, it's our No. 1 health enemy.

Check the habits you practice for heart protection:

- I keep my **waist circumference** below 35 inches (for women) or below 40 inches (for men).
- I don't **smoke** or I'm trying to quit smoking.
- I get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity **exercise** a week.
- I eat at least 2 cups of **fruit** and 2½ cups of **vegetables** daily and restrict **sugar** as well as saturated and **trans fats**.
- I restrict **alcohol** to 1 drink a day (for women) or 2 drinks a day (for men).
- I get routine checks of my **vital signs** (blood pressure, cholesterol, triglycerides and blood sugar) as my provider advises.



**Scoring:** If you answered **yes** to at least 4 statements, well done. If you mostly answered **no**, you've got changes to make. **Best prescription:** Replace the negative lifestyle factors that put your heart at risk with the heart-protective habits listed above.

## **Your Health: Excess Body Fat**

**How much should you weigh for good health?** Body weight actually matters less than body fat for health protection. In particular, excessive abdominal fat may increase your risk for type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and coronary artery disease.

### **We have 2 standards for measuring excess body fat in relation to health.**

**1. Body Mass Index (BMI)** — Your health care provider typically will check your weight and height at each office visit to identify BMI. Weight that is higher than what is considered healthy for a given height is considered overweight or obese.

BMI is only an estimated calculation of total body fat without regard for the individual's muscle weight or the location of fat. For example, abdominal fat is considered more harmful than fat in the hips and thighs.

**2. Waist circumference** — This measure provides an independent prediction of risk over and above that of BMI. Your waistline may say your health is at risk if you are:

**A man** with a waist wider than 40 inches.

**A woman** (non-pregnant) with a waist wider than 35 inches.

**Measure your waist carefully:** Place a tape measure around your middle, just above your hipbones. Keep the tape evenly horizontal all the way around, without compressing the skin.

Your BMI reflects total body fatness, while waist measure is the best estimate of visceral fat and risk for obesity-related diseases. To fully evaluate your individual health status and risks, your provider will want to perform necessary health assessments.

## **Top Fitness**

**Like any muscle, your heart needs regular exercise to maintain its strength.** In addition, exercise modifies several heart disease risk factors in beneficial ways: It helps lower your blood pressure, boost HDL (good) cholesterol, control weight and diabetes, and even ease stress.

**If exercise is so beneficial, why don't more people do it?** One reason may be the myth that exercise must be strenuous or requires lots of time to be effective. But even moderate-level activities may help ward off heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some types of cancer.

**The key is to choose activities that get your body moving** and raise your heart rate for an extended period of time. These include brisk walking, dancing, cycling and swimming, as well as some gardening and household chores.

**After 6 to 10 weeks of aerobic workouts** (30 non-stop minutes, minimum 3 times weekly), your heart muscle will strengthen, pumping more oxygen-rich blood with each beat. More oxygen leads to more health benefits.

**If you're put off by 30 non-stop minutes of exercise,** any increase in physical activity can improve your heart and blood vessels and reduce your risk of disease. Build up to a more vigorous regimen and you may add years — and quality — to your life.

**Note:** Consult your health care provider before making a major change in your physical activity level.

## Lemony Lentil-Rice Salad with Hazelnuts



### Nutrition Facts

#### (per serving)

Calories 231

Total Fat: 1g

Sodium: 2mg

Total Carbohydrate:  
34.8g

Fiber: 7.9g

### Ingredients:

3 tbsp hazelnut halves  
 1 tbsp olive oil  
 1 medium carrot, diced  
 1 tbsp shallots, finely chopped  
 1½ cups cooked lentils  
 1½ cups cooked brown rice  
 3 tbsp fresh lemon juice  
 1 tbsp fresh thyme, chopped  
 (or ½ tsp dried)

### What to do:

1. Toast hazelnuts in a hot, dry skillet about 2 minutes; watch closely to prevent burning. Remove and cool on a paper towel.
2. In same skillet, heat oil over medium heat; sauté carrot and shallots 2-3 minutes. Gently combine skillet mixture in a large bowl with lentils and rice.
3. Stir in lemon juice, thyme and nuts. Serve on a bed of greens with grape tomatoes.

**Toppers:** Try non-fat plain yogurt or crumbled goat cheese

## Food Fads: Behind the Headlines

**Before you go gluten free or start a juice cleanse, do your homework.** Here's some information that will help you make educated decisions about your diet.

### ❑ Is coconut oil the best fat?

**Coconut oil has been touted for everything from fat loss and improving cholesterol to boosting brain function.** Early research appears promising but much of the buzz about coconut is marketing hype for products containing it; look for credible data. Olive oil remains the best-researched fat for heart and brain health. Whichever oil you choose, practice moderation. Aim for no more than 2 to 3 tablespoons per day.



### ❑ Should I try a gluten-free diet?

**Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye, barley and foods containing these grains.** For the 1% of the population with celiac disease and the 5% with gluten intolerance, restricting gluten is the key treatment for their condition. But for the rest of us, there's no scientific reason to avoid gluten. If you suspect that you have celiac disease or gluten intolerance, get properly tested. Don't self-diagnose these conditions or prescribe your own diet. Check with your health care provider or dietitian first.

### ❑ Do I need to detox?

**Detoxifying with juice fasts, detox teas and cayenne-lemon cleanses is unnecessary.** The human body is equipped with a natural detoxification system to rid the body of waste — it's our kidneys, liver, intestines and skin. We cleanse and detox every time we sweat, urinate or defecate. No fancy juice concoctions are required.

**Best advice:** When researching health topics use reliable sources, including those with **.gov** in their URL (e.g., CDC, National Institutes of Health, Healthfinder.gov and National Library of Medicine).

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