

April – May 2015

Meet the New Extension Staff in NE Colorado

Jennifer Cooney is the new Extension Agent for Family & Consumer Science in Morgan County; starting her CSU Extension career on April 20, 2015.

She was born and raised in Colorado and a proud Colorado State University Alumni. Jennifer earned her Bachelor of Science in Health and Exercise Science from CSU in 2012.

She has a wonderful family, in which she enjoys spending time exploring the outdoors camping, fishing, hiking, and skiing.

Prior to working in Colorado Extension she worked for Denver Public Schools as a Health Disparities Coordinator, Adams 12 Elementary School as a Wellness Coordinator, and interned at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment on the Colorado Obesity Initiatives team.

Tara Friend is the new Extension FCS Program Coordinator in Logan County; also starting her Extension career on April 20, 2015.

Tara was born and raised in Colorado. My family moved to Logan County when I was 8 and has been here ever since.

She graduated from the University of Wyoming with a degree in Criminal Justice and Women's studies.

Her work experience has been working with at risk youth first as Diversion Coordinator in Wyoming and then as a child welfare caseworker for Logan County Human services.

Tara enjoys working with cattle on the family farm and spending time with her Irish Wolfhound.



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The Most Important Regular Health Screenings

Many of you have started out the New Year with a plan for more exercise and better nutrition. Why? Because it means feeling better, looking better and most importantly, it means better health. Making sure you are staying on top of your health must also include an annual check-up and regular health screenings that are recommended according to your age, medical status and family history. By ignoring this very important recommendation by doctors, you could be putting your life in jeopardy. Taking advantage of your local health fair can help you get the medical information you need at a lower cost.

As we age, the three most common causes of death are heart attack, cancer and stroke. Screening tests can be performed when the older patient is asymptomatic and healthy, so that they may not have to suffer from one of those three causes of death or other ailments that may be treated more successfully if caught early.

Screenings for Everyone:



Skin Cancer- Monthly, you should check your skin for any change in size, color, texture or shape of a mole, freckle or spot, or for any new marks, as these changes could suggest carcinoma or melanoma, both types of skin cancer. A spouse or someone close to you can help you check your back or hard-to-see places for the same. It is wise to have a dermatologist do a whole-body check of existing freckles and spots to help identify if anything needs further evaluation.

Colonoscopy- A colonoscopy is important for those around the age of 50 and then every 10 years afterward, unless a personal or family history suggests more frequent testing. This screening will identify polyps early so they can be removed before they become life-threatening with colon cancer.

Blood Work- An annual check of blood pressure, and a blood draw showing cholesterol and fasting glucose are important for disease prevention. Blood work also may include checks for hormone levels, liver enzymes, electrolytes and other indicators for doctors. Blood glucose levels can indicate if you are at risk for diabetes. With cardiovascular disease being the number one killer, it would be beneficial to know if you are at risk early, so that you can take measures to decrease that risk.

Eye Exam- A thorough eye exam is recommended to identify conditions, such as glaucoma, early. Glaucoma is a disease of the eye with increased pressure within the eyeball causing changes in the optic disc and therefore vision loss.

Screenings for women:

Cervical Cancer Screenings- Most pre-menopausal women have a pelvic exam each year. A pelvic exam can help detect growths on the ovaries and a PAP smear can detect pre-cancerous cells indicating a risk for cervical cancer. The same type of screening should begin after menopause and be followed by three PAP smears over a 10-year period.



Thyroid or TSH Test- A blood test will measure the amount of thyroid-stimulating hormone produced by the body. Thyroid disease is caused by the body over producing or under-producing the hormone, causing many symptoms. The TSH score can indicate to doctors whether medication is needed to treat the disease. Annual TSH tests are recommended for women 60 and older, for men it is recommended to start at the age of 70.

Mammogram- This screening for breast cancer should begin when a woman is in her 40's and should continue every year or two. A mammogram image taken before a woman is symptomatic may show a gray or white shaded area, the hallmark feature of cancer cells. Thus, early detection means better treatment outcomes. A diagnostic mammogram is also done if a lump or other indication of breast cancer is found. Remember to do frequent self exams, checking for lumps in the breasts and armpit, to help with early detection.

Bone Density Test- The DXA scan or densitometry is used to determine if one has osteoporosis or is at risk for the bone disease. This scan should begin for women at the age of 60 if they are at increased risk for fractures or have low body weight; otherwise the test is started at the age of 65. There is not a set parameter for how often the test should be given after that, so discuss a schedule with your doctor.

Screenings for men:

PSA Test- Doctors recommend that a baseline for the prostate specific antigen be established at the age of 40. A higher PSA score indicates a higher risk of prostate cancer. If there is a family history, or high PSA score then annual screens are recommended. Otherwise, discuss a schedule with your doctor, which may mean re-screening every two years. Again, catching prostate cancer early makes it treatable and has therefore, caused the number of prostate cancer deaths to decline.



AAA Screening- Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm is a weakened, bulging spot in your abdominal aorta, the artery that runs through the middle of your abdomen and supplies blood to the lower half of your body. An ultrasound of the abdomen can detect this condition and should be done at least one time between the ages of 65 and 75, especially if they have smoked or have a first-degree relative with an AAA repair.

Remember that prevention and early detection are the keys to health and survival, decreased cost and decreased suffering in the long run. So, take the time to make an appointment with your doctor. Take advantage of the upcoming health fairs in Phillips County toward the end of March to have many of the screenings done at lower cost and with less time constraint. Stay healthy in 2012!

Sources:

UCLA Division of Geriatrics Healthy/Years: Helping Older Adults Lead Happier, Healthier Lives. Volume 11G-R.

Mayoclinic.com

Understanding Gut Health



The digestive tract, also known as the gut, plays an important role in our everyday health. The digestive tract is responsible for digesting protein, carbohydrate, and fat from foods and beverages and absorbing fluids, vitamins, and minerals. Additionally, the gut provides a physical and immunologic barrier to harmful microorganisms, foreign material, and antigens potentially consumed with food from entering into our bodies.

Our guts contain “good” bacteria that thrive in our gut environment and in turn can provide us with various health benefits. Each of our gut bacteria profiles (also known as gut microbiome) are unique and are generally established by age 3. However, throughout life, bacteria in the gut can become imbalanced due to inflammation, incoming pathogens, poor diet, and antibiotics.

Gut bacteria imbalance can lead to the following:

- Diarrhea
- Increased opportunity to incoming pathogens
- Increased inflammation
- Abdominal pain/cramping
- Gastrointestinal tract obstructions
- Various diseases

For these reasons, it is important to have a healthy balance of gut bacteria. The more “good” bacteria we are able to support in our gut, the more “bad” bacteria we are able to keep out.

Did You Know?

It is estimated there are approximately 10 trillion microbes in our guts. That is about 3 ½ pounds worth of microbes!

The microbes in our guts can affect our health in many ways.

Establishing Your Child’s Gut Microbiome

- Much of our gut bacteria are influenced by our **environments** as infants from birth to age 3, at which point our gut bacteria stabilizes.
- Babies born from a **vaginal birth** versus a caesarean birth often have a higher abundance of bacteria with health-promoting effects.
- **Breast feeding** versus formula feeding has similar health-promoting effects in the gut.

Maintaining the Gut Microbiome

- **Choose a high-fiber, plant-based diet** with variety and moderation to provide the most benefit to your gut. Long term diet plays a critical role in maintaining and altering our gut microbiomes.
- **Minimize stress.** Stress can lead to increased inflammation in the gut.
- **Choose fermented foods**, which naturally contain probiotics, such as yogurt, fermented sauerkraut, and kombucha, fermented tea. Probiotics can help maintain the abundance and balance of healthy gut bacteria.
- **Choose foods high in fiber**, such as whole wheat, sweet potatoes, garlic, and leeks, which naturally contain prebiotics. Prebiotics are the fuel (or food) for the probiotics or good bacteria in the gut.

Restoring the Gut Microbiome

- **Use probiotic and prebiotic supplements**, which may be helpful in restoring your gut microbiome after taking antibiotics and in helping to restore balance. Consult your doctor before taking a probiotic supplement.
- In recent research, **stool transplants** for certain clinically ill patients have been effective in restoring healthy gut bacteria.

Make a Savings Plan During Financial Literacy Month

April marks Financial Literacy Month, a time when everyone can learn more about their personal finances and take steps to improve their financial picture. If you're looking for a place to start, America Saves provides 3 easy ways to assess your current situation and take action to save.

1. **Saver Checklist Tool** – Check off (<http://www.americasaves.org/for-savers/savings-tools-and-resources/saver-checklist-tool>) your savings accomplishments to see how you're doing.
2. **Assess Your Savings Tool** – Complete the assessment (<http://www.americasaves.org/for-savers/savings-tools-and-resources/assess-your-savings-plan>) to see if you are saving adequately and create a savings plan.
3. **Pledge to Save** – Once you start saving, it gets easier and easier, and before you know it, you're on your way to making your dreams a reality. The first step is to [take the America Saves Pledge](http://www.americasaves.org/for-savers/pledge) (<http://www.americasaves.org/for-savers/pledge>).



Those Who Take the America Saves Pledge Really Save

Each year, [America Saves surveys](#) those who have taken the America Saves Pledge to learn more about who these savers are, how much and what they are saving for, and how they feel about their savings.

<http://www.americasaves.org/for-savers/pledge>

Highlights from the America Saves Saver Survey:

- Savers reported largely saving for one of three goals: an emergency fund, retirement, or debt repayment.
- The longer people have been with America Saves, the more they have been able to save. Savers who joined in 2011 reported saving \$7,000 since joining America Saves.
- Married respondents were able to save much more than single respondents, even though they didn't report trying to save that much more.
- What females and males reported saving for differed widely. Females heavily favored saving for an emergency fund, while males heavily favored saving for retirement.
- Savers reported that since joining America Saves they are saving more, have become more confident about their ability to manage their money, are actually managing their money better, are managing their debt better, and feel more hopeful about their financial situation.

Savings starts when you take action; those with a savings plan are twice as likely to spend less than they earn, and save the difference. Celebrate Financial Literacy Month by making your savings plan today.

Katie Bryan works for America Saves, managed by the nonprofit Consumer Federation of America (CFA), which seeks to motivate, encourage, and support low- to moderate-income households to save money, reduce debt, and build wealth. Learn more at americasaves.org.