

## Team or Buddy System Approach to Weight Loss

It is common knowledge the friends or peers can influence behavior for the negative or the positive. Have you ever stopped to consider if your friends are influencing your weight?

One of the many findings from the Framingham Heart Study, that followed 12,067 people for 22 years, is weight gain typically spreads from one person to another much like a contagious disease; and it does so through social networks. A person's chances of becoming obese increased by 57% if he/she had a friend that became obese, 40% if an adult sibling, and 37% if your spouse became obese.

However, the evidence suggests that positive behaviors are contagious, too! So the recommendation is to identify and team up with other members of your immediate social network who have healthy eating and exercise habits. Pay attention to what they are doing, what they eat, how they work out, and try to imitate their good behaviors. It even works to link up with people through social media tools like Facebook or Twitter to keep in touch and share encouragement.

Social influence can really kick in when adults form teams and use pedometers to count and record their steps. People who were members of a more active team experienced a greater increase in their individual activity. So, find an active and healthy friend – or be an active and healthy friend that others can imitate!

(Source: Health After 50, Johns Hopkins Medicine, Special Winter 2014-15)

## February – March 2015

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## Dark Chocolate- The Sweet for Your Sweetie?



With Valentine's Day coming up, the conversation about chocolate is completely appropriate. The University of California, Berkeley reports in their *Wellness Letter* that chocolate derived from the seeds of the coca tree is good for your heart.

Such studies were reported in the *British Journal BMJ*, the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, and in *BMC medicine*, each study claiming the positive effects of dark chocolate or cocoa-rich products on the cardiovascular system. Lower risk of heart disease, less risk of stroke, lowered cholesterol, and small blood-pressure-lowering in people with hypertension and pre-hypertension were some of the clinical findings.

Chocolate, especially dark chocolate or pure cocoa products, have compounds called flavonoids in it. These compounds are in the same family as those that are found in tea, red wine, grape juice and other plant foods that give these foods their antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and anti-clotting properties. Flavonoids also increase the production of nitric oxide, which causes the blood vessels to relax and dilate, helping blood pressure to lower and decrease other cardiovascular effects. In addition, there is evidence to suggest the benefits of flavonoids from cocoa inhibiting cholesterol absorption and improving oxidation of LDL ("bad") cholesterol, making it less harmful.

OHH Yea! Chocolate is good medication and I love it! Not so fast though. First, just as there are studies that claim positive results, there are studies that did not have positive results and some that did not prove that it was the chocolate, not some other factor responsible for the benefits seen. In addition, with each of the studies using different formulations of flavonoid levels with different intakes, not distinguishing between milk and dark chocolate, it is hard for anyone to know what type or amount of chocolate is optimal. It is possible that people may react differently to chocolate too. Finally, remember that the chocolate that Americans love to eat is high in sugar, fat and calories, especially if the chocolate is paired with caramel, nougat and other fillings. So, if you eat too much of this chocolate, the positive heart of effects would be canceled out by weight gain.

Also keep in mind that not all chocolate is created equal. The processing of the cocoa beans changes the positive heart effects of the flavonoids. In general, dark chocolate has more flavonoids than milk chocolate. The manufacturer's recipe will play a role in determining the flavonoid content. Cocoa made with milk often causes a flavonoid reducing effect as well. If a higher flavonoid level in the cocoa is used then the reducing effect is less apparent.



So, advice for the chocoholic; chose the darkest chocolate that you like. Remember dark chocolate is not as sweet, so it might take a while to gain a "taste" for it. Like with other foods, chose a chocolate that has cocoa, chocolate liquor or cocoa mass as the first ingredient on the nutrition label, not sugar. Remember that chocolate is still a treat, not a health food, even if it can have heart-health effects, especially when used in place of other high calorie snacks or desserts. Fruit and vegetables are still the best source of flavonoids, as well as vitamins, minerals and fiber on a daily basis. Maybe combine the two for a nice little treat for your sweet this Valentine's Day. Dip yummy red strawberries in a luscious dark chocolate fondue pot.

## Juicing

Maybe your New Year's resolution included a promise to yourself to eat healthier, so you are trying to include more fruits and vegetables in your meals and snacks. Where do juices fit in?

Fruits and vegetables are key to helping prevent chronic diseases. They contain a variety of important vitamins and minerals as well as fiber and phytonutrients (plant compounds with antioxidant, immune boosting and other health qualities). When they come in the form of juices, however, things can get a little complicated.

Except for fiber, the nutrient level of fruit and vegetable juices can be very much the same as a whole fruit or vegetable itself. However, processing can affect the nutrient amounts and ability the body has to use it. For example, most of an apple's antioxidants are lost because the most nutrient-dense part of the apple is not used to make juice. When it comes to tomato juice though, the antioxidant, lycopene, is more available than in a fresh tomato due to the heat and oil used to produce the juice. Hand squeezing can make a difference too. Commercially squeezed orange juice and pomegranate juice have more phytonutrients and antioxidants than their hand-squeezed versions.

Another thing to consider is juices are more concentrated in calories and sugars than the fruit or vegetable itself. They also have less fiber and are more costly per serving compared to buying the whole food.

When buying juice products, be aware "juices" are not created equal. There are three main categories: 100% juice, juice drinks and fruit-flavored drinks.

100% juice is either squeezed directly from the fruit or made from juice concentrate reconstituted with water. The sugar in 100% juice is naturally occurring in the form of fructose. There are no added sugars, colors or additives, except in some cases when it is supplemented with vitamins or minerals.

Juice drinks are a blend of juice (anywhere from 10% to less than 100%) along with other ingredients or additives. They can contain added sugar, sweeteners and flavors. They are labeled as juice cocktails, blends, fruit "ade" or other terms. They may have the same amount of calories as 100% juice but lack the nutritional value.

Fruit-flavored drinks do not contain any fruit or vegetable juice. Sweeteners and flavorings are what give them their taste. They usually have vitamins and minerals added to look nutritious but lack the healthy compounds found in actual fruits and vegetables. They are also high in sugar.

So, when you are buying juice, look for 100% fruit juice, but don't stop there. Read the label and choose 100% juices with higher percentages of vitamins and minerals. Look at the ingredient list to determine exactly what fruits and vegetables were used. For example, say you choose a 100% juice made from a variety of fruits. Apple juice is the first ingredient and pomegranate the last. You are drinking much less pomegranate juice than apple.

When it comes to juicing your own drink, use a 3:1 vegetable to fruit ratio. This helps make the most of nutrients and flavor. Try choosing nutrient-dense foods like kale, spinach, beet and citrus fruits.

Juices can definitely play a role in helping you benefit from fruits and vegetables. Just be sure to choose wisely, and as with all things, include them in moderation.

## Change

In life, the one thing we can always count on is things are going to change. Change can be good or bad, cause excitement or stress, happiness or sorrow. Often change makes us feel uncomfortable.

Families experience change when a child is born, goes to daycare, grows into adolescence, or moves out of the home. Family change continues as young adults get married and have children of their own. Other changes include getting a job, losing a job, divorce, re-marriage, death, or loss of a family member.

People react differently to change. Some welcome it, while others react negatively. At one time or another, most of us have difficulty making changes. Even positive changes can be difficult. When faced with changes in your life consider these strategies:

**Be Flexible:** Life doesn't always follow our plan. However, opportunities often present themselves in unexpected ways. Learn to recognize and take advantage of these opportunities, even when they were not part of your initial plan.

**Stop the "what-ifs":** It's easy to think about what could go wrong. These thoughts can make it difficult to think about anything else. Give your mind a break from these worries, and you may find greater clarity. It is important to try to prepare for when things don't go as planned; but try to keep a positive outlook.

**Maintain Healthy Habits:** Have you ever had a change in your life that seems to consume your every minute? Then, one day you realize it has been weeks since you exercised; and you can't remember the last real balanced meal you eat. Change can lead to added stress. So, it is even more important to take care of yourself during these times. Make sure to get enough sleep, eat healthy, and exercise. You will be better equipped to handle life's changes.

**Look at the big picture:** Sometimes change is out of our control. During these times remember what is still within your control. Look at all your options and develop a plan or strategy as needed.

**Develop positive relationships:** It is important to have people you can rely on for support. Most importantly, surround yourself with people that are generally a positive influence. If needed, seek out support groups and clubs to help.

Before you know it, this change will have passed. You may even look back and say "that was a good change"! ...remember, it's inevitable another change is right around the corner.

(Source: Dealing with Change, <https://www.washington.edu>; Transitions and changes, [www.extension.colostate.edu](http://www.extension.colostate.edu))

## Train Your Brain for Better Health?

A new study from Tuft's Human Nutrition research Center on Aging is exploring the idea that following a new behavioral weight-loss program for six months can in turn reprogram your brain's food cravings.

This unique new research project used MRI scans of the brain's addiction center to see changes in the response to healthy and unhealthy food. The scans showed that it is possible to train the brain to reverse cravings and temptations for unhealthy food, replacing former cravings with temptation for healthy food.

People are not born craving salty foods and candy. This conditioning develops over time. Now, there is real evidence of the ability to re-train the brain to support healthier food choices.

(Source: Tufts University – Health & Nutrition Letter, January 2015)

## Tax Tip for 2014 Taxes

You may still have an opportunity or two to cut your 2014 tax bill. You have until April 15, 2015 to make tax deductible contributions into a traditional IRA (Individual Retirement Account). You may contribute up to \$5,500 (plus \$1,000 for people 50 and older) for 2014. Keep this in mind for the 2015 tax year, too.

Self-employed taxpayers can set up and contribute to a SEP IRA as late as October 15<sup>th</sup>, if you file for a due-date extension by April 15<sup>th</sup>. The annual contribution limit for a self-employed person is the lesser of 20 percent of your net self-employed income or \$52,000 for 2014.

A third option to consider... If you are eligible for a health savings account, you can put in deductible contributions up to \$3,300 for individual or \$6,550 for a family by April 15<sup>th</sup>.

(Source: Kiplinger's Retirement Report, January 2015)

## Women & Money

Most women indicated confidence in their being able to manage their household finances in the case of divorce or a spouse's death or debilitating illness. Many women already do with 85 percent of women saying they now manage household finances or share responsibility equally with their spouse. **However, 60 percent report not having a will and nearly 70 percent do not have a power of attorney.** (Source: Kiplinger's Retirement Report, January 2015)

Here's a fact sheet that may help you address this and other important household management issues: **Your Important Papers: What, Why, and How Long to Keep**, By N. Porter and L. Kubin\* (8/13). Other helpful online resources include: <http://www.smartaboutmoney.org/> and [http://www.extension.org/personal\\_finance](http://www.extension.org/personal_finance).

## Reducing Credit Card Expenses

We often fuss about credit card interest rates and fees. However, the first tip in reducing credit card expenses is to simply call the card issuer and ask for a better interest rate or to have a fee waived. CreditCards.com conducted a recent poll of 983 cardholders and found that two-thirds of those who asked for a lower rate got one. And 86 percent of cardholders that asked for a late fee to be waived were successful. So, if you have been a good customer and paid your credit card bills responsibly, it may be worth your time to make a phone call and ask for better credit terms. If the first person you talk to does not grant your request, then ask to talk with a supervisor.

While you have your credit card and bank card statements out, check them to verify all your holiday purchases. Make sure the amounts are correct; and dispute any errors in writing now to avoid more interest charges.

(Source: Consumer Reports – Money Advisor, January 2015)

## What's Been Happening

**Diabetes Webinars:** Join us in 2015 for a series of live webinars related to health and diabetes! Experts in the field will present on topics related to diabetes and diet, physical activity, kidney health and foot care. The webinars will be available at no cost in numerous locations throughout northeast Colorado.

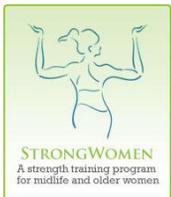
The first in a series of diabetes webinars was held on Thursday, January 22, 2015. Dr. Colby Jolly from Haxtun Family Medicine presented a 1 hour lesson on Weight Management for Prevention and Treatment of Diabetes. This presentation was broadcasted live to 9 locations across northeastern Colorado. You can view the archived video file at <https://connect.extension.iastate.edu/p5g0t3nr4c3/>.

The next one is set for April 8<sup>th</sup> on the topic of Diabetes and Exercise. Watch for more information coming soon.



**A Healthier Weigh** participants are taking steps to improve their overall health and wellness. **249 participants** weighed in the first week of January and received their pedometers. For 12 weeks they will record their steps, complete online lessons, and improve their health. Many will lose weight and inches as they compete for cash prizes.

Participants Per County	Logan	Morgan	Phillips	Washington	Yuma/ Kit Carson
	85	35	58	23	48



**Strong Women** have been building lean muscle, strengthening bones, relieving stress, and spending time with friends in your county. Call your local extension office for class information.

**Eat Smart** 



**Live Strong**

The 2015 Washington County Health Council luncheons launched the New Year on Wednesday, January 21, 2015 at noon in the Akron Senior and Community Center. Gisele Jefferson, CSU Extension Agent, presented **Eat Smart – Live Strong**. 40 participants learned three key behaviors to help improve health and well-being. Then they joined in the fun of creating and demonstrating some Indoor Winter Games!

### Upcoming Events!



**ServSafe** trainings will be offered throughout 2015 in various locations. The next training will be a **Food Handlers Training in Yuma County on Thursday March 12, 2015**. This training also qualifies for Colorado Cottage Foods licensing. Call Yuma County Extension (970-332-4151) for more information.



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