1. Strong families have healthy lifestyles. Activities such as walking, cycling, and swimming are family activities that keep everyone fit. Healthier people cope better with everyday stress. Action: Combine TV watching with an activity, such as sit-ups, jumping jacks, or deep knee bends.

2. Strong families appreciate special times. A strong, healthy relationship is a worthwhile goal for everyone. It helps adults develop their potential and it provides a model for children. Action: Remember special events such as birthdays or an anniversary. Show your appreciation through words, cards, time, gifts, or other special symbols of your love for the special people in your family.

3. Strong families keep promises. Commitments are promises we make to others or ourselves. When kept, they reinforce the trust in a relationship. When broken, they create doubt and mistrust. Action: Have a family discussion about the meaning of commitment. Be prepared to hear examples of un-kept promises as well as enjoying the special rewards of kept promises.

4. Strong families talk it over. Communicating is the key to successful decision-making, conflict resolution, child rearing, financial management, and many other family issues. It takes time and energy to make it work. When different values make agreeing impossible, "agree to disagree" is one option some families find helpful. Action: Focus on improving your family's communication skills by practicing listening to words, understanding unspoken (body) language, clarifying messages, giving feedback, and reaching understanding and agreement.

5. Strong families respect each individual. We are all members of various groups--work, religious, civic, school, and our most important group, our family. At the same time, we are unique and important individuals. In strong families, members appreciate and support each other as individuals as well as family members. Action: Talk about the most famous member of your extended family. Is this person's success due more to individual talents or support from others?
6. Strong families make time for each other. In some ways, time is like money—it seems like we never have enough of either one. Everyone finds the time or money for those things that are most important. How important is time with your family to you? Action: List a few household chores that could be finished more quickly as a team, rather than expecting one person to do most of them. Celebrate as a family with the time saved!

7. Strong families are fun. Happy times together may be planned or spontaneous, but strong families have fun with each other. Fun times make wonderful memories as we look back on family time. Action: As a family, plan and do an activity that everyone will enjoy—just for the fun of it. Later, talk about what you enjoyed.

8. Strong families believe in themselves. All families face tough times occasionally. Strong families have confidence that they will survive any crisis and come back even stronger. Action: Discuss a crisis that struck another family, maybe some friends, or in a movie. What family traits helped overcome the crisis?

9. Strong families are involved. Strong families create communities that care, almost like one big family. They know that, "If it is to be, it is up to me." Action: Introduce yourself to a neighbor you haven't met. Tell them about your family, invite them over for a visit, and offer your help if they are ever in need.

10. Strong families are able to forgive. The ability to forgive a family member for an action that is upsetting can open doors to deeper understanding. The fear of opening up trust to a person who has broken trust means that the relationship cannot grow. Action: Talk as a family about an issue that continues to create conflict, doubt, or blame. Discuss the reasons that forgiveness would be helpful and the reasons why it is so difficult. What would it take to help you forgive?

11. Strong families say thank you. Everyone likes to be told they are appreciated. Words, gifts, hugs, and time together are some ways to show others that we like what they did and value who they are. Action: Practice saying "thank you" to family members for the things they do daily to help the family function such as cooking a meal, cleaning a room, being polite, doing homework, earning a paycheck.

12. Strong families share beliefs and values. Being a family is more than just living under the same roof. For many families, religion shapes many of their beliefs. Strong families talk about their values and live them consistently. Action: Have each family member come up with his or her idea of a family motto. Share the mottos with one another and discuss similarities.

Source: North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Scotland County Center
Protect Yourself and Your Family from Debris Smoke

Natural disasters, such as hurricanes and floods, can leave a lot of debris. Some of this debris may be burned during cleanup. Smoke from these outdoor fires is unhealthy for you to breathe.

Smoke may cause you to cough. It can cause shortness of breath or tightness in the chest. It also can sting your eyes, nose, or throat.

These problems can begin a very short time after you breathe the smoke. You may have little warning, especially if you have lung or heart disease. Infants, children, pregnant women, older adults, and people with chronic diseases such as asthma are at greater risk from smoke.

Check with your local health and safety officials to find out when fires are planned in your area. If you smell or see smoke, or know that fires are nearby, you can take the following steps to protect yourself and your family:

* Leave the area if you are at greater risk from breathing smoke.
* Limit your exposure to smoke outdoors and indoors.
* Stay inside and use your air conditioner. If you do not have an air conditioner or smoke is likely to get inside your house, leave the area until the smoke is completely gone.
* Avoid activities that put extra demands on your lungs and heart. These include exercising or physical chores, both outdoors and indoors.
* Make sure you take all your medications according to the doctor’s directions. Contact your doctor if your health gets worse.
* Dust masks, bandanas, or other cloths (even if wet) will not protect you from smoke.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

A Guide to Walking Gear

Regular physical activity is part of a healthy lifestyle. Walking has gained popularity in recent years because it's easy to incorporate into busy lives, and a 30 to 60 minute walk, three to four times a week, can improve circulation and breathing while conditioning the body. Several other benefits include:

* Reduced risk of heart disease and stroke.
* Improved overall quality of life.
* Helps keep bones strong, which can help prevent osteoporosis.
* Helps build strength, flexibility and stamina.
Walking supports health in every sense - physically, mentally and emotionally. It enriches and balances your life and it makes you feel good. Before starting any exercise program, consult with your physician. The American College of Sports Medicine makes the following recommendations for an exercise program (for healthy adults to develop and maintain cardiovascular fitness):

* Exercise 3-5 days per week.
* Exercise at low to moderate intensity.
* Exercise for 30-45 minutes.
* Warm up and cool down for 5-10 minutes.

While walking is one form of exercise that doesn't require much instruction, it is important to have the right equipment when walking.

**Shoes**
Good shoes are essential. Shoes that don't fit properly are not only uncomfortable, but can lead to injury.

* Shop in a store that specializes in athletic footwear. Before buying, walk around in the shoes for at least a few minutes in the store. The heel should fit snugly and you should have room to wiggle your toes.
* Shop at the end of the day, when your feet are the largest.
* Wear your usual walking socks when trying on shoes.
* Don't shop when you're in a hurry. It's worth the effort to take the time to find the right shoe for you.
* Wear your shoes in the house for a few days to try them out. Don't venture outdoors until you are sure the shoes will work for you.

**Socks**
Next to shoes, your socks are one of the key essentials of walking gear. A lousy pair of socks can make a great pair of shoes feel awful. If your feet feel tired after walking on pavement, look for padded socks. Some socks are specifically designed for walking, with extra padding in the ball and heel. As a rule, socks made from synthetic fabrics work well; they keep your feet drier and retain their shape, softness, and resiliency. Some socks are two-layered, with an inner sock of fabric and an outer sock layer. These socks can help prevent blisters by reducing the moisture and the friction that cause them.

**Reflective clothing**
Reflective clothing is important in making you visible to others not only at night, but also when walking in the early morning or dusk. You can wear a reflective vest over your clothes.

**Waist pack**
When you're walking, you want to be able to swing your arms freely. For this reason, you really shouldn't carry anything, not even a water bottle or a cassette player. But you may have a few items -- your house or
car keys, money, medication, or tissues -- that you want to keep with you. That's when a waist pack can come in handy. Some waist packs are designed to accommodate water bottles.

**Water Bottle**
Drink plenty of water when you walk. Thirst often doesn't catch up with your body's need for water. The best way to carry a water bottle is in a waist pack. Some waist packs have a handy external bottle holder so you can get to your water quickly.

**Pedometer**
A basic pedometer provides a step count and distance walked. A pedometer works by counting the number of steps you take, ticking off a step every time you move your leg.

**Sun protection**
Your skin needs protection to prevent sunburn and skin cancer.

* Apply the sunscreen a half-hour before you walk so it can absorb into the skin to start its protection.
* Choose a waterproof sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher.
* Reapply sunscreen if you have been sweating or are out for a longer duration.
* Protect your lips with lip sunscreen.

*Source: Colorado State University Extension, Adams County*

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**Fostering Resiliency for Families in Transition**

**Tax Changes for All Taxpayers**

**Credit for Federal Telephone Excise Tax**
This credit was available only on your 2006 return. If you filed but did not request it on your 2006 return, file Form 1040X using a simplified procedure explained in its instructions to amend your 2006 return. If you were not required to file a 2006 return, see the 2006 Form 1040EZ-T.

**Penalty for Erroneous Claim for Refund or Credit**
There is a new penalty if you file a claim for refund or credit of income tax in an excessive amount, and you did not have a reasonable basis for making the claim. A claim is for an excessive amount to the extent that the claim exceeds the amount of the allowable claim. The penalty can apply to any claim filed after May 25,
2007. The penalty does not apply to any amount on which the fraud penalty or the accuracy-related penalty on underpayments has been applied.

Source: Internal Revenue Service, United States Department of the Treasury, January 25, 2008

**Stretch Your Money**

Whether you save pennies to make dollars, break habits and bank the savings, or find that you are the beneficiary of a long-lost life insurance policy, you are the one who has to manage your funds to best meet your individual and/or family goals. Remember that saving money does not make one a tightwad. On the contrary, saving money often allows you to have more of what is important to you and your family. As you continue on your path to saving money, you may find that the following ideas will serve you well as road marks on your journey.

**Adopt the Two-Week Rule**

If you think you really want something, wait two weeks to get it. The purpose of this habit is to make you an impulsive saver, not an impulsive spender. The two-week rule does not mean losing out on an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. How many items, such as expensive clothing, a new piece of furniture, a boat or recreational vehicle, or a new car, would not be there in two weeks? If you wait two weeks to buy big-ticket items, two good things can happen. You may find the same item less expensive somewhere else. Or you may discover that you really did not want the item once the initial excitement wore off.

Source: eXtension website: www.extension.org

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**Building Healthy Families**

**4 Tasty Ways to Enjoy Better Breakfast Bites**

Based on modern science (and the wisdom of mothers through the ages), breakfast is definitely a very important meal. Research shows that breaking your overnight fast with a balanced meal can make a major difference in your overall health and well-being. Eating a smart breakfast can help improve your attitude, enhance work or school performance, foster a healthy weight, and lower your risk of heart disease and stroke. On the other hand, skipping breakfast is a no-brainer – literally. Skip breakfast – and your brain and body suffer all day. Here’s how to eat well in the morning and get started on the nutrition fast track to a high-energy, health-smart day.

**Start with some powerful protein.** The missing link in many morning meals, protein is what you need to go strong and stay focused until lunch. Go lean with protein – a slice or two of Canadian bacon, an egg, some smoked salmon, a slice of deli meat or cheese, a container of yogurt, a scoop of cottage cheese, or leftover meat from the night before. Think outside of the breakfast box - microwave a quesadilla on a whole-wheat tortilla with black beans or enjoy a tofu scramble with chopped veggies and grated cheese.

**Add in longer-lasting whole grains.** A high-octane carbohydrate will help energize your body and brain for a busy day. Choose whole grains for an extra nutrition punch. They have more fiber and more antioxidants, plus they tend to digest more slowly and provide longer lasting energy. Go inside the cereal box for hot (especially oatmeal and multi-grain) or cold varieties. Whole grain breads, muffins, waffles, pancakes, rolls, tortillas, or even pastas can also help you rise, shine, and rev up your metabolism.

**Get fresh with fruits (or veggies).** Breakfast is a perfect time to enjoy the produce your body needs for
optimal health. Go with fresh fruit - bananas, kiwi, pears, apples, mangos, melon, oranges, grapefruit, or whatever is in season! Canned (pineapple or mandarin oranges) and frozen (blueberries and strawberries) can be used in yogurt parfaits and mixed fruit salads. Dried fruit is delicious on a bowl of cereal or in a bag of trail mix. How about chopped vegetables in an omelet or a refreshing glass of veggie juice? Looking for more ideas, check out www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org.

Rethink your morning drinks. Some of us can’t seem to get going without that morning cup of coffee - or that triple, extra whipped, tall mocha! While a moderate amount of caffeine is probably fine for most healthy adults (except pregnant women), many Americans are getting lots of extra calories from fancy coffee drinks. Non-fat or 1% milk is a very smart choice - plain or blended into a smoothie, shake, or latte. Concerned about caffeine overload? Switch to decaf, herbal tea, or lower-caffeine green tea.

What about breakfast bars? So-called “energy bars” are everywhere and the packages are filled with nutrition promises – to replace meals, boost energy levels, promote weight loss, and pump up your intake of protein, vitamins, and minerals. There’s no magic ‘pep’ in these bars. The energy is from calories, just like other foods. Some are no more than ‘souped-up’ candy bars, with lots of fat, saturated fat, and sugar. Choose bars with 10-15 grams of protein and at least 3 grams fiber.

Source: Eat Right Montana Newsletter, February 2008

'Pot' Belly is an Indicator of Future Heart Disease

University of Texas researchers report that having a "pot" belly (or a high waist-to-hip ratio) is linked to early signs of heart disease. In a study of 2,744 Dallas residents, researchers used different measures of obesity: body mass index (BMI), waist circumference (WC) and waist-to-hip-ratio (WHR) as assessment tools. They assessed how these measurements were associated with coronary artery calcium and aortic plaque, which are early indicators of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). They found that WHR was more closely linked to increased calcium and plaque than BMI or WC suggesting that obesity contributes to cardiovascular mortality due to increased atherosclerosis.

"Fat that accumulates around your waist seems to be more biologically active as it secretes inflammatory proteins that contribute to atherosclerotic plaque build-up, whereas fat around your hips doesn't appear to increase risk for cardiovascular disease at all. We think the key message for people is to prevent accumulation of central fat early on in their lives," said James A. De Lemos, M.D., a professor of medicine at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center.

Source: Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition, Extension, Colorado State University, Nutrition and Research Updates October-December 2007, Vol 29, Issue 4

Healthier Foods do not Prevent Harmful Effects of Fast Food

Recent research suggests that a single fast-food meal impairs endothelial function, a key marker for cardiovascular disease, according to lead investigator, Dr. Tanja K. Rudolph, University Hospital Hamburg-Eppendorf, Germany. Rudolph and colleagues measured the initial endothelial function and other markers of cardiovascular disease in 24 healthy volunteers. The 14 women and 10 men ate one of three readily available fast food meals during one week, a different meal the second week and the remaining meal the third week. Unexpectedly, the researchers found that endothelial function was adversely affected within 2 and 4 hours after eating each of the three meals, with no statistically significant differences among them. Furthermore,
all three meals had a negative impact on other cardiovascular disease markers as well, Rudolph said. "When we planned the study, our hypothesis was that "healthy" components like orange juice or salad would be able to prevent impairment of endothelial function," Rudolph noted, "But we could not show this. You cannot prevent the harmful effects of fast food to the vascular system if you only add healthy components," Rudolph concluded.

Source: Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition, Extension, Colorado State University, Nutrition and Research Updates October-December 2007, Vol 29, Issue 4

Please feel free to submit articles, news and photos by contacting the Scotland County Extension Office at 277-2422 by the 20th of each month.

Due to a scheduling conflict, the ECA BBQ has been re-scheduled for May 22. Please note this change in your calendar.

The South Central District will host ECA District Day on April 1, 2008 at Laurinburg Presbyterian Church. All members are invited to attend.

ECA 2008 Upcoming Events

South Central ECA District Day  
April 1  
All Day  
Laurinburg Presbyterian

BBQ Plate Sale  
May 22  
11 a.m. – 2 p.m.  
Extension Office