Have a Happy and Healthy New Year!

Healthy Weight Week is celebrated nationally during January each year. Start the new year off right by focusing on balanced living and heart health. Jobs, family errands, and other daily demands can be hard on your physical and mental health. Determine to set some goals and make heart healthy changes, such as reducing stress, eating healthy, being physically active, and aiming for a healthy weight. Let’s look at each one of these individually.

First of all, by reducing stress, take time to relax—for at least 30 minutes each day—by listening to music and reading a book. Also, limit the amount of screen time you spend each day to no more than two hours a day. This is time spent watching television or working at your computer. Try to get at least seven to nine hours of sleep each night. This should become easier as you lessen screen time and focus more on relaxation. Secondly, eat healthy, which means replacing full-fat versions of foods, such as milk, yogurt, and salad dressing, with the fat-free or low-fat kind. Make a conscious effort to increase your fruit and vegetable consumption, also. Just making these changes in your eating habits will help you feel better and shed a few excess pounds. I am including a delicious recipe to help you on your way. Thirdly, being more physically active will raise your metabolism and help you burn more calories. Walk, or do some sort of regular physical activity that you enjoy doing for at least 2 ½ hours a week. The fourth and last goal of aiming for a healthy weight should be more...
Amazing Asparagus 
Cooling AND Cool

*Ken McCarthy | The Real Food Channel*

Asparagus is one of those vegetables that people seem to either love or hate. Trying asparagus that has been properly prepared may change the haters into lovers. Here are tips on selecting, storing, and preparing asparagus for optimal nutrition. Click Here to Watch Video

UF/IFAS experts predict food trends for 2016

*Brad Buck | UF/IFAS Communications | November 19, 2015*

As 2015 starts to wind down, world-renowned food scientists at the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences are already predicting trends for 2016.

As they do, here are some hints as to what you can expect see to in grocery stores and on your dinner table: Click Here to Read Hints

UF creates trees with enhanced resistance to greening

After a decade of battling the highly destructive citrus greening bacterium, researchers with the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences have developed genetically modified citrus trees that show enhanced resistance to greening, and have the potential to resist canker and black spot, as well. However, the commercial availability of those trees is still several years away. Click Here to Read More

Cinnamon Glazed Carrots

4 cups baby carrots
Rinsed and split in half lengthwise; cover with water in pan and bring to a boil and cover. Cook until still firm but easily pierced with a fork. At end of cooking time, drain carrots in a colander.

In the same pan combine the ingredients for the glaze.

Glaze
2 Tablespoons soft tub margarine
2 Tablespoons brown sugar
½ teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon salt

Mix until well blended. (Option: heat in microwave to soften margarine.) Add cooked baby carrots to glaze and mix well. Serve as a delightful side dish with any meal.

Adults and children alike will love them!

Carolyn Hendry Wyatt
Family & Consumer Science/4-H Agent
Interim County Extension Director
chwyatt@ufl.edu
Would You Clean Out Your Closets for $400?

Mary Hunt | November 17, 2015

Are your storage areas overflowing? Do your children outgrow their clothes at the speed of light?

Have you “outgrown” (or just grown tired of) some of your clothes and household items? Wouldn’t it be nice to receive some cash for those unwanted but perfectly usable items that overwhelm your storage space?

It’s a typical scene. You’ve cleaned out a closet or your garage and have a box full of items you no longer want. Maybe they’re left over from a garage sale. You’d rather give it to charity than send it to a landfill or maybe you just don’t want to have a garage sale.

You know you can deduct the value of the items on your tax return. (By the way your return for 2015 is due April 18, 2016 with thanks to Wash., D.C. for the gift of a 3-day extension. Washington will celebrate Emancipation Day on April 15 and the IRS will be closed. The next business day is Monday, April 18, 2016.) But the question is how are you supposed to know the values of items in good condition that donate to qualified charities?

The problem: If we overstate the values we risk an IRS audit, penalties and interest. If we underestimate, we could end up paying more taxes than required.

For many years the hubs and I have relied on William Lewis, CPA, who compiles one of the most valuable resources I know of for ordinary folks like us. “Money for Your Used Clothing” is an amazing resource that lists more than 1,300 values for commonly donated household and clothing items based on current prices of these items on the secondary market.

How does he come up with this list? I can promise you he does not rely on haphazard lists anyone can find online that supposedly offer said market values. I don’t either because I know they have not been vetted against what used items are actually selling for in thrift stores right now, today, in the year 2015. And I don’t trust that those values have been vetted against what the IRS will allow, either. That’s what sets this resource apart.

Bill Lewis and his team (I know these people and they take this matter very seriously) travel from store to store, city to city, state to state to audit the actual price tags in thrift stores for everything from used shirts, pants, dresses, sweaters, blouses, socks, shoes, plates, sheets, towels, computers, vases, beds, dressers, lamps, chairs, sofas—just about everything you can imagine. Then they use the average prices to create this exhaustive list and make it available to us including clear instructions on how to present these tax deductions so the IRS is satisfied. You won’t believe what a thorough and complete resource this is.

Money for Your Used Clothing is also a workbook—one that you fill in with your specific information (the instructions are very easy to follow) then keep with your tax records.

If you are ever audited due to the values you claim on your return for Tax Year 2015, you’re in good shape because with this resource comes an Audit Protection Guarantee. Bill and his team will step in as your Power of Attorney to defend your deductions. And if the IRS prevails, Bill will pay any penalties and fees involved. How can they take on that risk? Because the information they provide is rock solid. It is reliable and I can tell you that from personal experience.

When Bill Lewis says you will increase your tax refund (or reduce your tax liability if you owe) by at least $250, he’s not kidding. In the past 20 years that I have been recommending this resource, our Everyday Cheapskate and Debt-Proof Living members have collectively saved hundreds of thousands of dollars in over payment of taxes.

If you donate items that are in good or better condition to a non-profit organization with tax-exempt status that gives a receipt for donations, you really need to capture the highest and best valuation for those donations. It’s legal, ethical and smart, too.

One more thing: You must use the 2015 Tax Year version of Money for Your Used Clothing for your 2015 return. You dare not try to use an earlier year’s valuations because that will void your Audit Protection Guarantee. Values change radically from one year to the next. Click Here to Read More
Emotional eating: Is stress, nutrition imbalance or your genes to blame?

If you relate to any of the following, you likely have the emotional eating trait:

- When I feel anxious, I find myself eating.
- When I feel blue, I often overeat.
- When I feel lonely, I console myself by eating.

Click Here to Watch: What is the emotional eating trait?

Emotional eating is when people eat for reasons other than hunger. Any of the following factors can lead to emotional eating:

**Stress.** When you feel stressed, your brain prompts you to seek out food (energy) to prepare you to escape or fight the stressor. Evolutionarily, this mechanism enabled you to escape a predator or other physical threat. But in modern day, stress is more often caused by mental and emotional stressors, which don’t require you to burn energy. Instead, the excess energy you consume when stressed is stored, ultimately leading to weight gain.

**Nutrition imbalance.** When you are lacking a key nutrient in your body, your brain sends out a signal causing you to crave food and eat so you can fulfill your nutritional need. However, most of us do not understand what nutrient our brain is telling us to get, or what foods to get it from. We simply eat foods that are available and convenient, whether they fulfill our nutrient deficit or not. With the wrong food choices, we continue to eat and still don’t feel satisfied.

**Feeling bored, lonely or anxious.** The brain’s reward system, also known as the hedonic system, is what makes us happy when we experience love, money, drugs, and of course, food. Because foods we enjoy can actively trigger this system, when not feeling well, some turn to these foods as a “quick fix” to help them feel better. Deficiency in *essential fatty acids* and amino acids can also cause anxiety and depression, in turn leading to emotional eating.

Take an online test to find out if you have the emotional eating or other traits that influence your weight.

**Emotional Eating and Hedonic Genes**

Your brain’s reward system is composed of a network of neuronal circuits. Two genes involved in the development and function of these circuits, **DRD2 and OPRM1**, have been extensively studied in relation to substance abuse and eating. Both genes directly affect the brain’s dopamine functions. Because dopamine is the “feel-good” hormone, these genes are called our hedonic genes.

- A variant in the **DRD2** gene reduces dopamine function in the brain. People with this variant are at increased risk for drug addiction and obesity, presumably because they overindulge to compensate for the decreased dopamine activity. This variant is found in about 38% of Africans, 39% of Asians and 18% of Caucasians.

- A specific combination of **DRD2** and **OPRM1** gene variants greatly increase risk for binge eating disorder. People with these variants are very likely to develop “addiction” to foods they enjoy by the same mechanism that addicts become addicted to drugs. About 14% of Asians and 11% of Caucasians have this combination, while very few Africans (less than 0.4%) have it.

Click Here to Check your emotional eating genes

**Prevent emotional eating with nutrition balance and a healthy lifestyle.**

You can use the HealthWatch 360 online tool and mobile app to track your nutrition, weight and mood. Find out what diet gives you the nutrients you need and food choices and eating patterns keep you energized and feeling your best.

To a healthy body and mind,
Do you eat dinner late?

Like late-night snacks? Watch out for high blood sugars and type 2 diabetes.

Eating a big dinner and enjoying nightlife are part of the fun of living in the modern day. Unfortunately, your metabolic system is geared to “sleep mode” at night. As day turns into night, your brain starts producing the “dark” hormone, melatonin, which communicates with receptors on your pancreatic beta cells, ordering them to “go to sleep.” This action inhibits insulin secretion to ensure there is an adequate supply of blood sugar for your brain while you sleep. However, less insulin also makes it more difficult for your body to stabilize blood sugars after eating. This means that eating a late dinner can lead to higher blood sugars and, in turn, increase risk for type 2 diabetes.

Your genetics might dictate what you should eat for dinner, and when is best to eat it, to minimize risk of type 2 diabetes.

Scientific reports show that people with a risk variant in their melatonin receptor gene, MTNR1B (G allele at rs10830963), have lower insulin levels after eating. This effect is most pronounced when melatonin levels are highest (at night). Indeed, large genetic studies show this variant is closely associated with elevated blood sugar levels and type 2 diabetes.

People with the MTNR1B risk variant need to be careful about eating late at night in order to prevent diabetes. The following can help:

- Eat dinner earlier.
- Avoid big meals at night.
- Limit carbohydrates, like bread, pasta, rice and desserts, at dinner.

Meditate Your Way to Health

No matter how much we enjoy our jobs, let’s face it, the workplace can be stressful. Stress can not only make us exceedingly cranky, but can also do a number on our health and well-being, even increasing our risk for serious illnesses. Click Here to Read More

Military Families – Young children with active-duty parents

More than 700,000 U.S. children under age six have or had an active-duty parent, and some have had two. Young children may be especially affected by a parent’s deployment, because of their emotional dependence on adults and susceptibility to high levels of stress. Read more about these children and how to support them in an article in Healing Magazine by Child Trends’ David Murphey. Click Here to Read More

How Much Physical Activity is Good Enough?

In August, Dr. Ken Powell wrote a compelling article on why physical activity should be regarded as a great bargain - a “best buy” - for public health. Yet we Americans largely aren’t buying. One of the reasons he gives is that there is a mistaken notion that this best buy requires a large commitment on our part: a significant investment with regard to time spent and physical effort (intensity) required. How did this belief come about? And, indeed, how much physical activity is good enough to qualify as a best buy? Click Here to Read More
Easy source of high quality protein

Ken McCarthy | The Real Food Channel

One of the biggest concerns for people who are avoiding or eliminating animal products from their diet is protein.

How to get it from plants? Do I have to eat tofu all day?

Good news: You don’t have to eat tofu all day. There are many other sources of high quality protein that are cheap, easy to prepare and delicious.

Here’s one... Click Here to Watch Video

Nutrient-Rich Red Peppers

Red Means Go!

The Real Food Channel

When I was young, red peppers weren’t available in stores, and I never liked the bitter green bell peppers.

Now bell peppers are available in an array of beautiful colors; they’re sweet, crunchy, delicious, and packed with nutrition. Click Here to Watch Video

Study Finds Youth Smokers Begin their Habit Because of Sweet Flavoring

Analysis by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) found that most teens who use tobacco start with flavored products. Click Here to Read More

- Avoid carb-rich snacks, like candies, cookies and chips, at night.
- Eat balanced, nutritious foods and get regular sleep.
- Maintain a healthy weight and exercise regularly.

Circadian rhythms and type 2 diabetes

Humans are diurnal, meaning we are biologically wired to function during the day and sleep at night. Melatonin is the hormone that signals your body to go into sleep mode, much like a timer that triggers the screensaver on your computer. Since you do not eat while you sleep, your blood sugar levels need to be maintained to prevent starving your brain of its preferred fuel: sugar (glucose).

Melatonin receptor molecules (like MTNR1B) on the surface of the pancreas ensure there is an adequate supply of sugar by blocking the release of insulin. Insulin is the major hormone that pours out into the bloodstream after a meal to orchestrate the clearing of nutrients from your blood and regulates appetite. While you sleep, it is advantageous to have lower insulin levels but only for as long as you are asleep and not eating food. However, if you are awake and working and eating foods while your insulin levels are biologically programmed to be low, this can result in elevated blood sugar and metabolic complications. This is what is observed in people who work the night shift and also people who carry the MTNR1B genetic risk variant.

Do you have the MTNR1B risk variant? Check Here to Find Out

Take action now!

Make the right choices today to maintain a youthful vigor. You can use the Health-Watch 360 web tool or mobile app to track your sleep quality, carbohydrate intake, blood sugar levels and energy balance. Discover what diet and lifestyle choices work best to help you live healthier and happier longer.
Two Options When Your Social Security Number is Compromised

Mary Hunt | December 3, 2015

I just received a letter from a reader that sent chills up my spine. It brought back vivid memories of having my purse stolen while traveling alone in a big strange city. The rental car keys, my cash, my one and only credit card, hotel key—everything I needed to keep going was in that bag.

There was one thing that I was not carrying. My Social Security card was safe at home. As it turned out, and thankfully, everything important in the bag was relatively easily cancelled and replaced.

Dear Mary: About a month ago my wallet was stolen out of my handbag while in the supermarket. I filed a police report, but they advised me it’s not likely I will ever get my wallet back or its contents. I reported this to my bank and credit-card company. Those accounts were closed and reopened with new account numbers. But I am sick with worry because my Social Security card was in the wallet. I don’t know what to do. What can I do? I so appreciate any guidance that will help give me some peace of mind. I’ve learned my lesson to never carry that with me. Just wish I’d been smarter sooner.

~ Marissa

Dear Marissa: I am so sorry to hear about this. But worry is the wrong response because that is totally unproductive. Worry doesn’t fix anything. Before I give you the advice that will help restore your peace of mind, I think it’s important that all of us understand that our Social Security numbers are much different than, say, a credit or debit card.

A Social Security number (SSN) is the single most important piece of government-issued identification an American citizen has. It is the most valuable piece of identification that cyber criminals can get their hands on. A valid SSN can be sold to undocumented workers or to people trying to hide their true identities.

A stolen SSN allows the thief—or those to whom he or she sells it—to do almost everything that you or I can do with our legitimate SSNs. By assuming a real person’s name and SSN, a thief can steal property and money from that person.

This is so very serious because if an identity thief uses your name and SSN to do criminal acts, the police are going to come looking for you, not that thief.

You can close a credit-card account or get your debit-card reissued if it is compromised, and you did. That’s good. The problem is you cannot close your SSN.

Even if, by some miracle, you were to get that card back, you must assume that the number itself has been stolen. And now here comes my advice: You can take control of this situation in one of two ways:

First Option. You can join a trusted and reputable identity-theft protection service like Lifelock. I, my family and my staff are all members of Lifelock. I believe in this service because I get to see it in action, almost daily.

Faithful readers may recall from a past column that one of my staff members, Max, has been contending with identity theft since he was a teenager. His SSN was stolen more than a decade ago. Hundreds of people have attempted to use his name and SSN to apply for jobs, file for his tax refunds, sign up for health insurance, apply for passports and get credit. Max’s SSN is still out there in the pockets of untold thousands of people. But Max no longer worries about it. He has peace of mind because Lifelock works for him 24/7, moving into action the moment his SSN is ever used in any kind of application. People try to use it but they’re stopped dead in their tracks. I’ve seen the alerts and it’s amazing.
In just the past week Max has received three alerts from Lifelock, with information on three people trying to open credit-card accounts using his SSN. Once Max responds that this is not him using his SSN, Lifelock puts a stop to these applications immediately before the thugs can even complete the first step.

**Second Option.** You can take the steps that follow yourself, steps that are necessary to manage your compromised SSN. If you choose this route, you need to get busy.

- Contact one of the three major credit-reporting bureaus Equifax (888-766-0008), TransUnion (800-916-8800), or Experian (888-397-3742) to place a fraud alert on your credit file. That bureau will contact the other two. Make sure that you renew the fraud alert every 90 days until you’re satisfied the matter has been settled. It could take years.
- Tell each of the three bureaus that your SSN has been stolen. They’ll give you free copies of your current credit reports. Go over these reports looking for unfamiliar accounts and unknown inquiries from companies.
- Contact the Social Security Administration to get a replacement of your SSN card.
- Report the theft of the SSN to the IRS. Call 800-908-4490 to do this. That will prevent tax-fraud thieves from filing tax returns in your name—and collecting your tax refund.
- File an identity-theft report with your local police. The police report will be necessary to help clear your records and your name in the future.
- Keep track of, record, report and close all fraudulent accounts by contacting both the companies holding the accounts and the credit-reporting agencies. This will keep your credit as clean as possible going forward.

If several years pass after the theft of your SSN, and the problems arising from the theft continue, you may want to consider applying for a new SSN. But before you do, there are several things to consider: It’s not easy. In fact it is nearly impossible, that’s how rare it is. Even if the administration grants you a new SSN, your old SSN will never go away completely. The Administration never invalidates an SSN once it’s been used.

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**Is the Paleo diet the right choice for you? Ask your TCF7L2 gene**

**Type 2 diabetes** is more common in people with genetics that are incompatible with modern foods and lifestyles. People whose ancestors ate diets least similar to today’s Western diet are at greatest risk for the condition, with a polymorphism within the **TCF7L2 gene** being the strongest genetic risk factor. People with the ancestral allele(s) in this gene do not handle refined carbohydrates as well and may be better suited for diets that are more similar to the diets of preagricultural hunter-gatherers.

**The Paleo Diet**

The **Paleo diet** reflects an eating pattern of our preagricultural ancestors and is characterized by the following:

- Emphasizes vegetables, fruits, meat, fish and eggs
- Limits grains and added sugars
- High fat, protein and cholesterol
- Low carb and low glycemic load

For people with diabetes linked to their TCF7L2 gene (which is often associated with lower BMI and not insulin resistance) the Paleo diet may offer benefit. Diets with a lower glycemic load (GL) that limit desserts and milk reduce risk of type 2 diabetes for this group. These dietary patterns and choices align with the Paleo diet.

In contrast, for the majority of diabetes cases (which stem from overweight and obesity with insulin resistance) the Paleo diet could be harmful. Because of the higher fat and protein content, the diet seldom meets
Dietary Guidelines recommendations. People with the APOE4 gene variant need to be particularly careful about following a Paleo diet as they can develop high cholesterol and cardiovascular diseases when the level of fat in their diet is too high.

**How can you reduce your risk of type 2 diabetes?**

- Eat a diet with a low GL.
- Reduce your intake of high-GL foods, such as rice, pasta, pizza, breads, bagels and desserts.
- Maintain a BMI below 25.
- Exercise at least 30 minutes per day, five days per week.
- Use HealthWatch 360 to monitor glycemic load and 30+ essential nutrients in your diet.

**How do TCF7L2 risk variants increase risk of type 2 diabetes?**

TCF7L2 controls your body’s ability to secrete insulin into your blood in response to a meal. As you eat a meal containing sugars, proteins and fats, your body normally secretes insulin to signal your cells to take up the nutrients in your blood. In the absence of adequate insulin, over time, sugars and lipids accumulate in your bloodstream leading to numerous life-threatening complications.

Those with TCF7L2 risk variants have a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes because specialized cells in their pancreases, called beta cells, inefficiently produce and/or secrete insulin in response to a carb-rich meal. Insulin secretion is tightly regulated by a group of hormones known as incretins such as GLP-1 and GIP that are made by cells in the intestines that ready the pancreas to make and secrete insulin. Genetic variation in TCF7L2 may be related to a defect in incretin-stimulated insulin production and/or secretion. Click Here to Check your genes.

HealthWatch 360 now allows you to select a Health-Watch goal and receive a personalized nutrition plan to help prevent and manage chronic diseases and conditions like prediabetes, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. You can also modify goals for specific nutrients based on your dietitian’s or doctor’s recommendations. Track your blood sugar levels and over 30 nutrients in your diet and find out what works best for you and your future health.

**Why 88% of New Year’s Resolutions Fail and How to Make them Work**

*Mary Hunt | November 26, 2015*

More than half of Americans, reportedly, make New Year’s resolutions. And 88 percent of those resolutions end in failure, according to a study by British psychologist Richard Wiseman.

There is a scientific reason for this fail rate that once we understand, we’ll be able to keep our resolutions long enough to make them stick.

The bottom line is that our brains cannot handle New Year’s resolutions. No seriously. It has to do with willpower and our brains’ cells that operate that particular mental function.

The human brain is divided up into sections—each one handling different aspects of brain function. The pre-frontal cortex (the part located at the front behind your forehead) is assigned the tasks of 1) staying focused 2) handling short-term memory 3) solving abstract tasks, and 4) willpower.

**Here’s the problem:** That part of your brain cannot handle all of those things at the same time. It requires a huge amount of focus and willpower to change a learned behavior overnight, which is what a New Year’s resolution demands.

Bad habits are hard to break—and they’re impossible to break if we try to break them all at once. The focus and willpower required are just too much for the human brain. It simply cannot deliver.

The human pre-frontal cortex is like a muscle. It has to be trained. If you joined a local gym, you would never dream of starting out lifting a 300-pound barbell on your first session. You’d start with a 2-pound weight for a 2-minute session, working up slowly to heavier weights and longer periods of endurance.
Trying to keep a New Year’s resolution to quit smoking or lose a bunch of weight, is expecting your pre-frontal cortex to pick up the equivalent of a 300-pound barbell on the first attempt—and to keep doing it for hours on end. It’s just not possible.

Typically, New Year’s resolutions go something like this: I am going to lose 20 pounds; I’m going to get out of debt, stop smoking, get organized, give up sugar, or run two miles a day. Does anything there sound at all familiar? Those are abstract goals that your brain cannot handle. They are too vague.

Here’s the secret for how to make your New Year’s resolution stick, according to B.J. Fogg, Ph.D., director of the Persuasive Tech Lab at Stanford University: Make the resolution a habit first. And break it down to a tiny habit to start.

Strong willpower is not a character trait. Accept it. And don’t make the mistake of dumping the idea of making a New Year’s resolution. Just don’t depend on willpower.

Instead, depend on these four steps to make your New Year’s resolution stick:

**Step 1:** Pick only one resolution. Your brain cannot handle more than one. Accept it. Analyze everything you’ve thought about to change and pick the one thing that’s most important to you.

**Step 2:** Take baby steps. Make it tiny, even ridiculously so. A good tiny behavior is easy to do and fast. Think: walk for three minutes, or do two pushups. Floss one tooth. Any of those actions may sound useless, but this is the way to get started. Your brain will thank you by suggesting in due time that you increase that to a four-minute walk or that you floss two teeth.

**Step 3:** Become accountable. Write down what you want to change. That makes you more likely to succeed with your new habit, and increases your overall happiness as well. Tell others. Social support is beneficial. So is accountability.

**Step 4:** Give yourself positive feedback. Or seek that from your accountability group. Reward yourself with things that make you feel great. Positive feedback will increase your success rate and strengthen your desire to keep going by taking on another baby step. And another and another all the way to permanent and glorious change!