

The Home Extension Line

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Family and Consumer Sciences Department Staff

Carolyn Gregov, Ph.D.
Extension Director
cgregov@scgov.net

Maria Rometo, Ed.D., M.A.Ed.
FCS Agent II
mjoswald@scgov.net

Mary King
Program Specialist
mking@scgov.net

Jodi Williams
Administrative Specialist
jdwillia@scgov.net

website: sarasota.extension.ufl.edu



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*Family and Consumer
Sciences Department
University of Florida -
Sarasota County Extension*



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What Are Energy Drinks All About?

Energy drinks are nonalcoholic beverages with the addition of so-called "energy enhancing" ingredients. These additions might include vitamins, amino acids, caffeine, guarana, carnitine, ginseng and inositol.

Positive effects promised by some manufacturers include improved muscle tone, increased endurance, and higher mental capacity. The drinks are popular with athletes and young adults, who often drink them before workouts, at dance clubs (often mixed with alcohol), as an afternoon pick-me-up, or for all-night study marathons.

There are concerns regarding the use of energy drinks.

- Energy drinks are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. Manufacturers can mix a variety of ingredients into the product without anyone checking out whether it's safe.
- A high intake of caffeine can boost heart rate and blood pressure. The high caffeine level found in these drinks is not suitable for children or anyone sensitive to caffeine.

The main ingredients found in energy drinks are caffeine and sugar. Caffeine content is equal to a cup of regular brewed coffee. Sugar contributes about 25-30 grams of carbohydrates (100-130 calories) in an 8 ounce serving.

Source: Connie Burns, Health and Nutrition Extension Educator, MS, RD, University of Minnesota

Free Credit Reports

Florida Agriculture and Consumer Services Commissioner Charles Bronson is urging residents to take advantage of the free credit reports from each of the three major credit reporting agencies.

Since 2005, federal law has allowed people to get one free credit report annually from each of the three credit reporting agencies. The amendment to the Fair Credit Reporting Act was designed to provide consumers who cannot or will not pay a fee for the reports to access them for free.

A credit report contains information about a consumer's credit history, including a listing of all credit cards, whether bills have been paid on time, and whether the consumer has been sued, arrested or filed for bankruptcy. National consumer reporting agencies sell the information to credit card companies and other creditors, insurers, employers and businesses that use it to determine whether to approve an application for credit, insurance, loans and employment. A poor credit history can result in rejection of credit or higher interest rates on a loan.

Bronson recommends that consumers get one of the reports every four months to monitor their credit throughout the year. He says that enables people to quickly report any mistakes or fraudulent activity, such as a credit card obtained in a consumer's name by someone else.

"When someone has been victimized by an identity thief, if they catch the problem early, they can minimize the damage to their credit," Bronson said.

Bronson is also reminding consumers that they can put a security freeze on their credit reports. While there is a small fee for the service, the freeze prevents access to a consumer's credit report without their authorization. So a criminal would be unable to open a charge card or other account in the consumer's name without their knowledge.

A recent AARP study found that 81% of older consumers are concerned about becoming a victim of identity theft but less than one third were aware of security freeze options.

The three major credit reporting agencies are Equifax, Experian and Trans Union. To obtain a free copy of reports from these agencies, log onto <http://www.annualcreditreport.com/>. People should be wary of any other sites which claim to offer free reports but steer consumers to sites that offer services by subscription for a fee. Consumers can also order their reports by calling toll-free 877-322-8228.

Source: Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Saving Money at the Grocery Store

1. A good shopping list is your number one tool to help stretch food dollars and save money at the grocery store. You must plan ahead to have a good list and plan to stick to the list.
2. A good list is based on:
 - Your budget: Know how much you can spend for food.
 - Your meal plans: What will your family eat between food shopping trips?
 - Nutritional needs of your family.
3. You must plan ahead. List things as they run low, so you won't have to make extra trips to the store. Extra trips can ruin your food budget due to all the temptations in the store.
4. Also, plan ahead to have everything needed for meals and snacks before the next planned trip to buy groceries.
5. Your plans should also include enough foods from each food group to provide healthy eating for you and your family.
6. Plan ahead and eat before you go food shopping. Never go grocery shopping when you are hungry. If you are hungry in the grocery store, you are likely to buy way too much food. Hungry shoppers buy too much and usually make poor food choices.
7. If possible, shop alone. If you must take children with you or even another adult, be sure that they have eaten before you go shopping. Also, make them your shopping partners by allowing them to make some selections within preset limits. For example, if apples are on your list, and the price is about the same for the amount that you plan to buy, they could decide if you get red delicious apples or golden delicious apples.
8. Be sure your shopping partners can help stay within the budget. Teach them to use these skills to compare prices:
9. Always read the grocery ads.
10. Use unit prices. The unit price is the price for one "measure" of the item. For example it may be the price per pound or the price per ounce. Many stores will have the unit price labels on the shelf just below the item. Make careful comparisons. You will find that sometimes, the larger container will have the best price per unit, and sometimes the smaller container will have the best price. If the larger size has the best price, then buy the larger size if you can store and use it before it goes to waste.
11. Compare store brands or no-name brands with the well-known national brands. The store brands or no-name brands are almost always cheaper than the national brands.
12. Use coupons if it really helps save money for something that you need to buy. Even with a coupon, sometimes the national brand is still more expensive than the store brand.
13. When comparing some food items, you need to compare the cost per serving or the cost per meal. For example, some meats have a lot of bones. So even though it may be the lowest cost per pound, it is not the best buy because so much of it cannot be eaten.

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14. Use the food label, especially the nutrition facts panel. The food label makes it easier to compare different foods and make healthier food choices, including how to:

- a. Check the serving size and number of servings.
- b. Compare the number of calories per serving.
- c. Determine if a food is high or low in a nutrient.

15. Always consider food safety when shopping for food. Buy the refrigerated and frozen items last so that they can keep at a safe temperature until you reach home. If the weather is very hot or if you cannot go home immediately, take a cooler with ice in your car so food can be kept at a safe temperature.

16. Place any meat that may drip away from other foods to avoid cross contamination. In other words keep foods separate for safety.

17. It pays to know your prices so you can tell whether or not you are getting a good deal. Keep track of the cost of the items that you usually buy. You can jot down the price of things while in the store, or you can review your receipts and jot the prices in your planning “notebook” at home. Maybe one of the children can help.

18. Watch out for those items that are known as impulse items. Stick to your shopping list and limit or avoid those extras like sodas, alcohol, sweets, and chips. Such items are usually high in cost, high in calories and low in nutritional value.

19. Be careful when checking out. Many items are placed to get your money one more time before you check out. Such tempting non-essentials are there like candy, gum, magazines and so forth. Candy is often placed at the eye level of children riding in the grocery cart. Some stores have a “candy free” check out lane. Take advantage of such lanes. If one is not there, perhaps you can request it.

20. Finally, be sure to pay extra attention at the checkout. Watch the price scanners and check receipts for price errors. Be sure you have handed the checker any coupons or discounts that you are entitled to.

21. Always plan ahead and take advantage of things that you can do to save money at the grocery store.

Source: Glenda L. Warren, M.S., R.D., CFCS, Associate Professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, University of Florida/IFAS, Gainesville, FL

When Changes Overwhelm You

Whether it's a health scare, the end of a relationship or a promotion at work, change is an inevitable part of life. But that doesn't mean it's easy.

If changes in your life leave you reeling, cope by using these stress management tips:

- Expect change. Things change. When you recognize this, changes will be less shocking and easier to accept.
- Put changes in perspective. Ask yourself, "How important will this be in six months? One year? Is it worth damaging my health?"
- Educate yourself. Learn all you can about your new situation in order to understand it better.
- Be positive. Expect good results from the changes in your life.
- Keep a sense of humor. If you can't find humor in your situation, find other ways to get a laugh — such as from a funny book or movie.
- Lean on others. Call on family, friends and co-workers for support.
- Take care of yourself. Make time to eat well, get enough sleep and exercise.
- Practice relaxation techniques. Cope with change-related stress by writing in a journal, practicing deep breathing, listening to music or doing yoga.
- Be flexible. Instead of putting your energy into fighting change, focus on how you can make things easier on yourself.

Source: Mayo Clinic Health Solutions

When Burnout Strikes

Whether you work behind a desk or on an assembly line, you may experience burnout at some point in your career. What's burnout? It's an overall feeling of frustration and irritation that leaves you physically, emotionally and mentally exhausted.

Overcome burnout with these tips.

- Take care of yourself. Eat a healthy diet and get enough sleep.
- Spend time with friends who energize you — and limit social activities with those who drain you.
- Exercise. Working out is a great stress reliever.
- Write a reasonable daily to-do list to make your accomplishments more tangible.
- Plan something to look forward to every day. Schedule fun activities — whether going out to a movie with friends or playing a game with your children.
- Take short breaks during your workday.
- Have a hobby outside of work, such as hiking, or reading or following a sports team.
- Go on vacation. Getting away for a few days can give you a whole new outlook.

Source: Mayo Clinic Health Solutions

Keeping Your Cool in Hot Weather

Getting too hot can make you sick. You can become ill from the heat if your body can't compensate for it and properly cool you off. Heat exposure can even kill you: it caused 8,015 deaths in the United States from 1979 to 2003.

These are the main things affecting your body's ability to cool itself during extremely hot weather:

- High humidity. When the humidity is high, sweat won't evaporate as quickly, which keeps your body from releasing heat as fast as it may need to.
- Personal factors. Age, obesity, fever, dehydration, heart disease, mental illness, poor circulation, sunburn, prescription drugs and alcohol use can play a role in whether a person can cool off enough in very hot weather.

Here are some facts about which people are at greatest risk for heat-related illness and what protective actions to take to prevent illness or death:

- People who are at the highest risk are the elderly, the very young and people with mental illness and chronic diseases.
- But even young and healthy people can get sick from the heat if they participate in strenuous physical activities during hot weather.
- Air-conditioning is the number one protective factor against heat-related illness and death. If a home is not air-conditioned, people can reduce their risk for heat-related illness by spending time in public facilities that are air-conditioned.

You can take these steps to prevent heat-related illnesses, injuries, and deaths during hot weather:

- Stay cool indoors.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Replace salt and minerals.
- Wear appropriate clothing and sunscreen.
- Schedule outdoor activities carefully.
- Pace yourself.
- Use a buddy system.
- Monitor people at high risk.
- Adjust to the environment.
- Do not leave children in cars.
- Use common sense.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov

Tablet Splitting: A Risky Practice

Some pharmacists have reported that patients have changed the way they take medications because of the downturn in the economy, according to a recent survey by the American Pharmacists Association. This includes skipping doses and splitting tablets in an effort to save money. Regarding the practice of splitting tablets, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the American Medical Association and other medical organizations advise against it unless it's specified in the drug's labeling.

Tablet splitting often involves buying higher strength tablets and then breaking the tablets in half or quarter doses as a way to lower drug costs. For instance, a 30 mg tablet may cost the same amount as the 15 mg tablet. So a patient may try to save money by buying the 30 mg tablets and splitting them all in half. This might seem like a smart money-saving strategy, but the practice can be risky.

Why Splitting Tablets is Risky

- **You might get confused about the correct dose.** There have been cases when people have purchased higher strength tablets intending to split them, but then they forgot to split them. Instead, they took the whole tablet. This led to accidentally taking too much medicine.
- **Equal distribution of medicine in split tablets is questionable.** Studies have shown that the actual dose in each half of a split tablet often is different. So while the two halves may look the same, they don't necessarily contain equal amounts of medicine. Even if the tablet is scored with a line that runs down the middle, one half may actually have more medicine than the other.
- **Some tablets are hard to split.** Some tablets are too small to split, may have an unusual shape that makes them hard to split, or may crumble more easily when split. Also, some people may not be able to split tablets correctly. These factors make it difficult to accurately split a tablet.
- **Not all pills are safe to split.** Patients may mistakenly think that any pill can be split. But some pills, such as capsules and time-released drugs, should always be taken whole. For example, some tablets are coated with a substance that helps to release the medicine slowly. Splitting these tablets destroys the coating, which means you might absorb the medicine too fast or not at all.

What if You Still Want to Split a Tablet?

FDA has approved drugs where tablet splitting is part of the manufacturer's drug application. FDA does not encourage the practice of tablet splitting unless it's specified in the drug's professional prescribing information. If a patient is considering splitting a tablet, FDA recommends that the patient get advice directly from his or her doctor or pharmacist to determine whether it is appropriate or not for a particular drug.

Source: www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates

Fresh From Florida Kids

“Fresh From Florida Kids” is a program to help parents instill healthy eating habits in their young children.

Tips for Staying on Track:

Activity, activity, activity! Keeping yourself and your toddler active with games, walks in park, even gardening (what child doesn't love to play in the dirt) will go a long way toward making healthy, active choices in the future.

Make sure the rewards you give your child are extra attention, hugs, kind words or even a small sticker and not a candy bar or cupcake. Food (even healthy food) should not be associated with any kind of reward or attention.

Make mealtime fun and plan a-once-a-week special dinner for your family. Have family members name each dish with a silly name like “super-duper spaghetti” with “sparkly space salad” and “best bread ever.” Choose a vegetable no one has tried before and make it the “star” of your evening meal. Even a toddler will get the idea something is different tonight.

When eating out, avoid allowing your toddler to fill up on bread while you wait for your meal. Many restaurants will offer carrots or other raw vegetables for kids to snack on while you wait.

Hot weather is here. Remember to keep children well hydrated, particularly when outdoor play is a part of their daily routine. Offer water often and avoid drinks that are high in empty calories.

A good, low-fat choice for dipping is salsa. Control the spice and make your own. Experiment with different fruits like mangoes, strawberries and peaches.

Try one new food or recipe each week. Shopping for in-season fruits and vegetables can help with this and save you money.

If a favorite food suddenly becomes number one on the list of “no”, try turning it into a finger food or serving it with something new and different. Toddlers love finger food.

Mom (and Dad) don't ignore your snacking urges. Keeping healthy snacks on hand can make your hectic life much easier, such as:

- Low-fat cottage cheese with a fresh fruit or vegetable.
- Pre-sliced oranges or chunks of melon in the fridge.
- Whole grain crackers or low-fat pretzels in small, sealed containers for on-the-go.
- Pre-cut celery and carrots in the fridge.

Be your child's first and best healthy role model. Look for like-minded parents to share tips and motivation to raise smart eaters!

Plan weekly menus ahead of time to save money and valuable time.

Source: www.freshfromfloridakids.com/tips.htm

14 Ways to Enjoy Dining Out for Less

Dining out is one of the fun things in life. It might be for a special occasion or when you are limited with time. If your budget is tight, try not to let dining out become an expensive habit for you. It is so easy to say, “I am too tired to cook,” or “I don’t have the right ingredients.”

When you do eat out, there are ways to save money at the restaurant, such as:

1. Set aside money each month just for eating out and then don’t overspend.
2. Look for restaurants where you order your food and serve yourself. You don’t pay for wait service or tips.
3. Some restaurants offer an early bird special, usually from 4 pm to 6 pm, with lighter selections that are less expensive than the dinner menu.
4. Some restaurants will let you order from the kids menu. It has smaller portions and costs less.
5. Look for discount nights such as “kids eat free on Thursdays.”
6. Dine at lunch, the portions are smaller and the food cheaper.
7. Try locally owned ethnic restaurants for good deals on authentic food.
8. Take advantage of restaurant specials or use coupons usually found in the local paper.
9. Skip the beverage and order water. One of the biggest markups in the food industry is drinks with alcohol, soda and coffee.
10. Skip the appetizer and save yourself money and calories. Or order the appetizer as your entrée along with a salad.
11. Split the main course with another member of your party.
12. Skip the dessert.
13. Remember to bring home the leftovers for tomorrow’s lunch.
14. Carryout can be much less expensive than eating in the restaurant. Just buy part of the meal and fix the salad at home.

Source: University of Minnesota Extension

Kids & Veggies Are Better Together

Help your child eat smart and play hard. Serve veggies at meals and snacks.

- Set a good example. Make sure your child sees you eating veggies.
- Children are more likely to eat veggies they help to prepare. Give them small jobs helping to prepare veggies: **2-3 year olds:** scrub veggies; tear lettuce; snap green beans. **4-5 year olds:** mash soft veggies like cooked potatoes and beans; stir veggies or mix into other foods; top pizza with cut-up veggies.
- Encourage your child to eat a variety of veggies by choosing different colored veggies each day.
- Prepare veggies different ways – raw or cooked, plain or mixed with other foods. Children like to dip fresh veggies into low-fat salad dressings and dips.

Veggie Tips for Your Family

- Have veggies ready-to-eat for easy snacking. Put washed and cut-up fresh veggies in the refrigerator where your child can see them.
- Be creative in adding veggies to your family's meals:
 - Toss cooked veggie pieces with cooked pasta and Italian dressing.
 - Add cooked or canned veggies to canned soups,
 - Mix cooked or canned veggies to rice or bean casseroles.
 - Top pizza with chopped vegetables.
- Children eat more fruits and veggies when meals are eaten together as a family.
- Encourage your child to try new veggies. Do not force your child to eat. It may take many times offering a new food before a child will taste it.

Source: University of Illinois Extension, Nutrition Education Program

Florida Food Fare

by Mary King
 Family & Consumer Sciences
 University of Florida / IFAS
 Sarasota County Extension

Kumquats

Description: The name kumquat comes from the Cantonese word for “golden orange.” Introduced in the United States in about 1850, the kumquat is now a popular citrus fruit grown in South Florida. Varieties include: the Marumi, which has a small round fruit, a sour pulp and a sweet peel; the Nagami, which has a rather large oval fruit about an inch long; and the Meiwa, which is a large fruited, round kumquat that has a rather sweet pulp. The Marumi is commonly used along drives where it makes a round headed tree which is covered in the winter with brilliant yellow fruit. The Nagami is used extensively as an ornamental and to dress up gift boxes. Although frequently used as an ornamental, this small orange colored fruit is excellent for edible garnishes and makes a wonderful marmalade or jelly.

Availability: Kumquats are available in the market from October to April, but are most abundant in the winter months.

Nutritional Value: Kumquats are rich in potassium and low in calories. One kumquat is approximately 12 calories and 37mg potassium.

Selection and Care: Select brightly colored fruit. Avoid fruit that is wrinkled, dull in appearance or moldy. Fruit should be pressed to determine that they are firm, like baby mandarins, not soft and wet. Because of their thin skin, they spoil more rapidly than oranges. If they are to be used within a few days, kumquats may be stored at room temperature. They may be stored for about two weeks in the refrigerator in a sealed plastic bag. For longer storage, they may also be frozen.

Use and Preparation: Serve kumquats as you would grapes, as part of a formal fruit bowl or offer them alone on a dish as a palate refresher. The entire kumquat can be consumed. The peel may be added to season carrots, winter squash, pumpkin or tossed in a fresh spinach salad. The spicy fruit flavor adds zest to meat and poultry dishes too. They can also be preserved or made into marmalade.

Recipes:

Sunshine Carrots

1 pound carrots peeled and quartered, then cut into 2-3” sticks	1/3 cup golden raisins
1 ¼ cups water	1/3 cup honey
½ cup kumquats, sliced and peeled	2 tablespoons butter

Combine carrots and water in a medium saucepan, cover and simmer for 8-10 minutes. Add remaining ingredients; cook uncovered over medium heat until carrots are glazed, stirring occasionally. Yield: 4 servings.