

The Home Extension Line

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Individual Highlights:

Telephone Tax Refund	1
Money Saving Tips	2
New Tools for the Nutrition Facts Label	3
People Make More Food Decisions Than They Think	4
Good Things in Small Packages	5
Keeping Food Safe	6
Healthy Eating for Your Family	7
Folic Acid Boosts Cognition in Older Adults	8
Spring Clean Your Way to a Safer Kitchen	9
How to Clean the House Safely	10
Poison Prevention Week	11
Florida Food Fare	12

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Telephone Tax Refund

What is the telephone tax refund?

The telephone tax refund is a one-time payment available on your 2006 federal income tax return, designed to refund previously collected long-distance federal excise taxes.

Why is the government refunding these taxes?

Several recent federal court decisions have held that the tax does not apply to long-distance service as it is billed today. The IRS will refund to you the taxes on long-distance service billed to you for the period after Feb 28, 2003 and before Aug 1, 2006. Taxpayers should request this refund when they file their 2006 tax returns.

How do I get the telephone tax refund?

Individual taxpayers can take a standard amount from \$30 to \$60 based on the number of exemptions claimed on their tax return. For those claiming this refund the instructions to the 2006 1040 tax forms will provide more information on how to determine the correct number of exemptions.

I don't have to file an income-tax return. How do I get the telephone tax refund?

For those who do not otherwise have to file a tax return, there is a new form (1040EZ-T), which can be used to get this refund.

Do I have to itemize to claim this refund?

No. Because this is a refund of taxes previously paid, it does not matter whether you itemize or take the standard deduction.

Where do I go for more information?

Instructions for requesting this refund will be included with your tax forms and on the IRS web site: www.irs.gov.

Source: Internal Revenue Service, Washington, DC

Money Saving Tips

Low-cost Ways to Save Energy

- Air-dry dishes instead of using the dishwasher's drying cycle.
- Turn off computer and monitor when they are not in use for extended periods of time.
- Plug home electronics into power strips and turn power strips off when not in use.
- Lower thermostat on hot water heater to 120°F.
- Wash only full loads of dishes and clothes.
- Clean/replace AC filters monthly; cleaning or replacing dirty air filters can save 5% of the energy used to run the AC system.
- Close the air vent in the laundry room.
- [Replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs.](#)
- Caulk or weatherstrip air leaks; visit this [Caulking and Weatherstripping Online Brochure](#) for how-to information.
- Repair leaky air ducts: these are recognized as a major source of energy waste and can prevent HVAC systems from working properly (request a duct system test from your home's energy provider).
- Close blinds and shades during the day to keep out the sun's heat .

Get a Free Energy Audit

A representative from your energy provider company may come to your home and inspect windows and doors for leaks and look at the insulation, water heater, and piping. Call your provider to see if they offer this energy audit service for free.

Calculate how much energy your home uses at the Department of Energy's [Home Energy Saver](#).

Buy a New Appliance

[EnergyStar®](#) is a government-backed program to help you protect the environment through superior energy efficiency. EnergyStar appliances use significantly less energy and water than older models. In addition, most large appliances are sold with a yellow energy efficiency label. These labels should be carefully examined and compared with similar products for the most energy- and cost- efficient product for you.

For more information and a list of EnergyStar certified [products](#), check out <http://www.energystar.gov>

Source: <http://livinggreen.ifas.ufl.edu/> University of Florida/IFAS Living Green Website

New Tools for the Nutrition Facts Label

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Food and Drug Administration's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN) have unveiled two new learning tools to help consumers use the Nutrition Facts label to choose nutritious foods and to achieve healthy weight management.

The tools are *Make Your Calories Count*, a Web-based learning program, and a new *Nutrition Facts Label* brochure.

"The risk of many diseases and health conditions may be reduced through preventive actions and a culture of wellness deters or diminishes debilitating and costly health events. Individual health care is built on a foundation of responsibility for personal wellness," said HHS Assistant Secretary for Health John Agwunobi, M.D., in announcing the nutrition aids. "We at HHS are pleased to introduce both the new Web-based program and the brochure, which contribute to the nutrition focus of the department's prevention priority."

The Web program is part of the FDA's response to the recommendations contained in a 2004 report issued by the agency's Obesity Working Group. The program is based on recommendations in the federal government's 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. The *Dietary Guidelines* contain science-based advice designed to help Americans choose diets that meet nutrient requirements without exceeding calorie needs, promote health, support active lives, and reduce the risk of chronic disease.

"This learning program provides a quick and simple way to educate consumers on how to use the Nutrition Facts label," says FDA Commissioner Andrew C. von Eschenbach, M.D. "By making it easier for consumers to understand the Nutrition Facts label, the FDA is helping them make quick and informed food choices that contribute to lifelong healthy eating habits."

Make Your Calories Count is an interactive online learning program that is also available in a downloadable format. It is designed to help consumers understand and use the Nutrition Facts label to plan a healthy diet while managing calorie intake.

The program guide features an animated character, called Labelman, who expertly leads the viewer through a series of exercises on the food label. The program includes exercises to help consumers explore the relationship between serving sizes and calories while they learn how to limit certain nutrients and get enough of others. For simplicity, the program presents two nutrients that should be limited — saturated fat and sodium — and fiber and calcium, two nutrients that should be consumed in adequate amounts.

Consumers can use the Nutrition Facts label to take control of their caloric intake and weight and to make healthy food choices, if they know how. This program will show consumers how, in part, by explaining what serving sizes, percentages, and daily values mean and how to use them. The program is available for online use and in a downloadable format at www.cfsan.fda.gov/labelman. A new downloadable *Nutrition Facts Label* brochure for use by consumers is also available. The brochure can be used by health professionals to teach people how to make healthier food choices. The brochure includes information that will help consumers understand the relationship between calories and serving size, which may help them use the label to manage their intake of calories. [Visit \[www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/lab-gen.html\]\(http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/lab-gen.html\) to download.](http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/lab-gen.html)

Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Washington, D.C.

People Make More Food Decisions Than They Think

While people estimate that they make about 15 food and beverage decisions each day, they actually make more than 200 such choices, Cornell University researchers say.

Their study, published in the January issue of *Environment and Behavior*, surveyed 139 Cornell staff and students to estimate how many decisions they make about food each day.

On average, the participants estimated they made about 15 food decisions per day. But, when they answered specific questions about when, what, how much and where they ate, and who made decisions about meals, the participants actually made an average of 221 food-related decisions each day.

“So many food decisions are made on mindless autopilot,” Brian Wansink, the John S. Dyson Professor of Marketing and of Applied Economics at Cornell, said in a prepared statement. Wansink said that the problem with making more food decisions than we are aware of is that each decision can be influenced by the environment.

“It’s really easier than we think to let small things around us – plate size, package size, people around us, distractions – influence these 200-plus decisions, because we are not aware of them in the first place,” Wansink said.

Wansink added that, instead of trying to obsess over food decisions, people should change the environment so that it works for them. He offers the following tips to prevent overeating, from his recent book, *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think*:

- Use smaller bowls.
- Avoid eating directly from the package.
- Bank your calories (e.g. skip the appetizer if you want to indulge in dessert).
- Dine next to the slowest eater at the table.
- Eat the foods you love but in smaller portions.
- Pick two of the following: appetizer, drink or dessert.
- Fill half your plate with vegetables, and the other half with protein and starch.
- Keep tempting treats out of sight.
- Sit at least an arm’s length away from the buffet table or snack bowl.

Source: The National Women’s Health Information Center, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Good Things in Small Packages

If you can eat just a few in one sitting, nuts can boost your health.

During the low-fat craze of the 1990s, doctors and nutritionists cautioned people to eat nuts sparingly. Calorie-laden and high in fat, they became the pariah of the plant kingdom.

Not anymore. Recent research indicates that, eaten in moderation a few times a week, nuts are more than just another component of a nutritious, well-balanced diet. They may also help reduce the risk of heart disease, strokes and cancers. Now researchers are zeroing in on the different substances in nuts to see just which ones are responsible for the health-enhancing effects.

Examples of nutritious nuts are:

Almonds. In one ounce (about 1/3 cup), almonds have about half the recommended daily amount of Vitamin E, a powerful cancer-fighting antioxidant. Almonds also have more fiber than other nuts.

Brazil nuts. Brazil nuts provide a rich source of selenium, an essential trace mineral that may help prevent prostate, lung, colorectal, gastric and skin cancers, as well as heart disease. One ounce of Brazil nuts (6-8) can have more than 500 micrograms (mcg) of selenium, enough to meet the Recommended Dietary Allowance for a week, while other nuts provide about 1 mcg.

Peanuts. Peanuts are high in folate, a B vitamin that lowers blood levels of possibly harmful homocysteine. Low folate levels have been associated with colorectal, lung, esophageal, brain, cervical and breast cancers as well as heart disease. An ounce of peanuts contains about 10 percent of the recommended daily intake of folate. Peanuts also contain the antioxidant resveratrol.

Walnuts. Walnuts are high in a type of omega-3 fatty acid called alpha-linolenic acid. Omega-3 fatty acids, prevalent in fatty fish and leafy greens as well, may slow tumor growth and reduce cholesterol, triglycerides and blood pressure. Walnuts also contain more antioxidants than any other nut. They have less vitamin E than almonds, but make up the difference with a variety of other antioxidant phytochemicals. Walnuts are best stored in the refrigerator or freezer.

Nuts are filling, and snacking on a handful can help stave off hunger for a few hours. For the greatest benefit, eat a variety of nuts several times a week or even daily, but limit portions to one ounce (150-200 calories). People who have trouble stopping after one ounce can try sprinkling chopped nuts on breakfast cereal, salads and casseroles.

Source: American Institute for Cancer Research Newsletter

Keeping Food Safe

Food may be contaminated and still look and taste good. When in doubt, throw it out!

When food goes bad, it can make you sick. This is called food poisoning. To prevent food poisoning, be careful when you buy, prepare, and store your food.

When Buying Food:

When shopping, buy groceries last. Buy hot and cold foods such as milk, cheese and meats last. Get them home fast.

At home put food in the refrigerator or freezer right away. Check cans and jars to make sure they are not dented, leaking or bulging.

Storing food at home: keep it safe, refrigerate:

- Buy only eggs that are kept in a refrigerator case and are not cracked.
- Never leave groceries in the car or shopping cart for a long time! If perishable food is left out for 2 or more hours, bacteria can grow to dangerous levels. In hot weather, it may take only 1 hour for food to spoil.
- Refrigerate food that must be kept cold: milk, cheese, meats, and eggs.
- Freeze fish, meat and poultry that you don't plan to use in the next 2-3 days.
- Put all meats in plastic bags. Their juices may contaminate other foods.
- Keep dry food, such as pasta, flour, rice and sugar, in airtight containers.
- If you are not sure how long you have kept food, throw it out. Do not taste it!

Source: Lucia L. Kaiser, Community Nutrition Specialist, University of California, Cooperative Extension

Healthful Eating for Your Family

Healthy eating is important to you. After all, you want your family to have energy, be healthy, and stay well. You want your child to grow properly. You control your family's food choices more than you may think.

Guidelines ... For Your Family's Health!

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans can be your family's guide to smart eating and active living. This advice is meant for anyone in your family, ages two and over.

Make smart choices from every food group.

- Follow a healthy eating plan that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products.
- Include lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts.
- Choose food low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt, and added sugars.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation. Pregnant women should not drink alcoholic beverages.

Find your balance between food and physical activity.

- Balance calories from food and beverages with calories expended.
- Be physically active for at least thirty minutes most days of the week.

Get the most nutrition out of your calories.

- Eat a variety of nutrient dense foods.
- Make at least half of the total grains eaten whole grains.
- Eat the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables and choose a variety each day.
- Keep food safe to eat.

For more about *The Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, check this website:

www.cnpp.usda.gov.

Source: Nibbles for Health 1, Nutrition Newsletters for Parents of Young children, USDA, food and Nutrition Service

Folic Acid Boosts Cognition in Older Adults

Dutch researchers have added another chapter to the continuing debate over whether folic acid supplements can sharpen the aging mind. Their conclusion: The nutrient does improve cognitive function in older adults.

Previous studies on the subject have been split, although most have suggested that folic acid supplementation in people with high levels of the amino acid homocysteine in the blood helps with cognitive function. Higher homocysteine levels are associated with an increased risk for cardiovascular disease and stroke and possibly also Alzheimer's disease.

The new study, published in the January 20, 2007 issue of *The Lancet*, adds to the growing impression that adding folic acid can help brain functioning, at least in certain groups of people. "We can certainly take away that folate is going to be beneficial for cognitive improvement when you have high homocysteine levels," said Maria Carrillo, director of medical and scientific relations at the Alzheimer's Association.

"This underscores the importance of B vitamins," added Richard Finnell, Regents Professor in the Center for Environmental and Genetic Medicine at Texas A&M's Health Science Center Institute of Biosciences and Technology at Houston. "They do more than protect babies against birth defects." Folic acid, or folate, is a B vitamin probably best known for its role in helping to prevent neural-tube defects in newborns.

But folic acid also has several other functions: It helps the body digest and utilize proteins and to synthesize new proteins when they're needed; it's essential for the production of red blood cells and the synthesis of DNA; it helps with tissue growth and cell function; it helps to increase appetite when needed; and it stimulates the formation of digestive acids.

Food sources for folate include beans and legumes; citrus fruits and juices; wheat bran and other whole grains; dark, green leafy vegetables; poultry; pork, shellfish and liver, according the National Institutes of Health.

Cognitive function, especially areas such as information processing speed and memory, decline with age. These cognitive changes have been linked to a risk of dementia.

For this study, researchers randomly assigned 818 older adults in Holland, aged 50 to 70 years old, to receive 800 micrograms of folic acid supplementation daily or a placebo for three years. All participants had low folate levels, as evidenced by elevated homocysteine concentrations.

Adults who received the folic acid supplementation had improved cognitive functioning, especially in the areas of memory and information processing speed. What's more, folate concentration increased 576 percent in those getting the supplements, and homocysteine levels fell 26 percent.

Source: Medline Plus, a service of the U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health

Spring Clean Your Way to a Safer Kitchen

When you're shaking off the winter with spring cleaning, it's a great time to target harmful bacteria that can lurk on kitchen surfaces and even in your refrigerator. *Salmonella*, *Staphylococcus*, *E.coli* and *Listeria* are just some of the bacteria that may be hanging out in your kitchen. While you can't see or smell BAC! — short for bacteria — they are everywhere, and they especially like moist environments. A clean and dry kitchen helps Fight BAC!® and protect you and your family from foodborne illness.

Some cleaning tips you should practice year round to make your kitchen and your meals safer include:

- **Always clean surfaces thoroughly with hot, soapy water.** After thoroughly washing surfaces with hot, soapy water, you can sanitize them with a diluted chlorine bleach solution or a disinfectant kitchen cleaner. Use just 1 teaspoon bleach to 1 quart of water. Let the solution stand on the surface for a few minutes; then blot dry with clean paper towels.
- **Disinfect dishcloths often.** Launder dishcloths and towels frequently using the hot water cycle of the washing machine. Then be sure to dry them in the dryer. Dishcloths harbor bacteria and when wet, promote bacterial growth. Also, consider using paper towels to clean up kitchen surfaces.
- **Rid your fridge of spills, bacteria, mold and mildew.** Clean your refrigerator weekly to kill germs that could contaminate foods. To tackle bacteria, mold and mildew, clean interior refrigerator surfaces with hot, soapy water. Rinse with a damp cloth; dry with a clean cloth. Manufacturers recommend against using chlorine bleach as it can damage seals, gaskets and linings.
- **Clean your kitchen sink drain and disposal.** Once or twice a week clean your kitchen sink drain or disposal by pouring a solution of 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach in 1 quart of water down the drain. Food particles get trapped in the drain and disposal, creating the perfect environment for bacterial growth.

With these simple tips, you can reduce your risk of foodborne illness. Remember to FightBAC!® by following four simple steps: Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill. For more information, please visit www.fightbac.org.

Source: www.fightback.org or www.foodsafety.gov

How to Clean the House Safely

Injuries are no stranger to those involved in sports, but did you know that you can be at risk of injury from everyday activities such as cleaning your house? You can get tennis elbow without ever lobbing a ball!

But elbows aren't the only body parts at risk. Improper or overuse of muscles and tendons in the fingers, hands, arms, shoulders, neck and back, as well as repeated movements and awkward postures, can cause fatigue and strain that may permanently damage soft tissues. These aches and pains, known as Repetitive Strain Injury or Cumulative Trauma Disorder, can require medical attention. Twisting to clean in areas behind hard-to-reach pipes, straining to dust a light fixture that's out of arm's reach or leaning on both knees while you clean the tub can cause body aches.

Nancy Bock, Vice President of Education and Meetings at The Soap and Detergent Association, points out some common mistakes people make when cleaning house and offers some suggestions for avoiding new injuries and minimizing flare-ups of existing ones.

Bending Basics

When housecleaning, bending is almost like breathing — most of us don't even give it a thought! We bend to pick up cleaning supplies or bend to clean in corners and crannies. If you are in the habit of hunching your shoulders and bending over from the waist, you are a candidate for back strain. To help avoid this, bend at your knees and keep a hollow in your back. Practice this bending technique until it becomes second nature.

Knee Knowledge

If a task like scrubbing the floor or cleaning the tub calls for getting down on your knees, don't put pressure on both knees at the same time. Instead, kneel on one knee and then switch to the other one every minute. Alternating knees will minimize and disperse the pressure.

Reach Right

Reaching farther than your full arm extension can put strain on both your shoulders and your spine. Use a sturdy stool or stepladder so that you don't hyperextend your back. Use cleaning and dusting products that include wands or poles that extend your reach.

Lift Light

Whether you're picking up the laundry basket or the cleaning bucket, bend from the knees and keep the back straight as you lift straight up. To help avoid back strain, keep the load close to your body. If the load is heavy or awkward, don't lift it by yourself — get a buddy to help.

Take Stretch Breaks

Whether you're scrubbing the floor or folding laundry, stand up and gently stretch your body several times an hour. Your spinal column is surrounded by fluid that contains nutrients. Each time you move your spine, those cells receive much-needed nutrients that will help prevent stiffening.

Source: The Soap and Detergent Association

Poison Prevention Week – March 19-25

Over 400 containers of poison enter the average home every year. Take care regarding two hazardous activities: using strong cleaners and disposing of unwanted chemicals.

Safe Cleaning

- Most poisonings occur because a product is being used, not because products aren't stored safely. Keep cleaners away from curious kids.
- Avoid mixing bleach with ammonia or acids. Bleach (also known as hypochlorite) is in many products such as scrubbing agents, disinfectants and purifiers. The easiest rule is to simply avoid mixing bleach with other cleaners.
- Use less toxic products when possible. Try non-chlorine scouring powder or baking soda for scrubbing. Use vinegar and water solution for a glass cleaner. Mix and cover baking soda and vinegar in a clogged drain instead of using drain cleaner. Spray vinegar & water on shower after use to prevent mildew buildup.

Safe Disposal

- Unwanted pesticide, oil, paint, cleaners and other chemicals can be taken to designated county solid waste collections. To find out about collection dates and locations in your county, go to www.earth911.org and type in your zip code.
- Keep products in a secure area away from children and pets. Avoid transferring chemicals into drink bottles or other unmarked containers.

Poison Information Center — Tampa

24 Hour Hotline: (1) 800-222-1222
Administrative Line: (813) 844-7044
Website: www.poisoncentertampa.org

Source: Florida Poison Information Center

Florida Food Fare

Lemon Balm

By Jean Meadows

Description: *Melissa officinalis* (lemon balm) is a lemon-scented, lemon flavored member of the mint family. Attractive and easy to grow, this herb's leaves may be green, yellow or yellow and green-variegated. The green variety does best in the warm Florida climate, where even the yellow and variegated varieties will produce mostly green leaves because of the heat. The oval, almost heart-shaped leaves are shiny and have scalloped edges. Its small light blue to white flowers bloom in late spring to mid-summer. This perennial herb grows practically anywhere, but should get partial sun in Florida. It lacks the tendency to spread as much as most other herbs and does well as a container plant for patio gardeners.

Availability: Originally native to southern Europe and northern Africa, lemon balm is now cultivated throughout the world. It will grow year-round in Florida under proper conditions, but is seldom found in produce sections of the supermarkets. You may find freshly cut lemon balm in stores or farmers markets that carry a plentiful line of herbs. You will also find the plant with the herbs at garden shops.

Selection and storage: Lemon balm can be used fresh or dried. When using whole fresh leaves, be sure to handle them carefully, as they tend to bruise easily. Although the leaves dry quickly and easily, they will not be as fragrant as the fresh. Also, the leaves are much tastier when fresh. Store dried leaves in tightly closed containers.

Use and preparation: With its delicate lemon flavor, lemon balm is valued as both a culinary and medicinal herb. Fresh sprigs are used to top drinks and as garnishes on salads and main dishes. Fresh or dried, its leaves make a refreshing tea, either alone or with other herbs, served iced or hot. Dried leaves are used as an ingredient in many potpourris and the oil is used in perfume. The fresh leaves also lend a light lemoniness to salads, mixed fruits, herb butters, fish, poultry and custard sauces. The addition of citrus or pineapple intensifies the lemon flavor. Add the leaves at the very end of cooking if possible to preserve the most flavor.

Recipe:

Lemon Balm Vinaigrette

2 tablespoons lightly flavored olive oil	1/8 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon chiffonade of fresh lemon balm	Fresh black pepper to taste
	2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar

Combine all ingredients just before using, for the freshest taste and brightest color. Use a salad dressing with baby lettuces and a touch of grated, aged Jack cheese, or toss with steamed vegetables.