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Individual Highlights:

Make Your Lunch Waste-Free	1
Supermarket Savings Tips	2
Don't Let Food Safety Practices Go Down the Drain	3
Save Time and Hassles with USA.gov	4
Whey Protein: Nutritional Powerhouse	5
Top 10 Ways to Enjoy Spinach	6
Get Punchy Without Alcohol	7
Do You Owe Money to the IRS	8
Tips to Prevent Lead Exposure	9
Florida Food Fare	10

Family and Consumer
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Make Your Lunch Waste-Free

What are you having for lunch today? Take a look at the packaging and consider which items will be thrown away. Each year Americans generate millions of tons of waste in our homes and communities. We can lessen this amount by taking simple steps to reduce the amount of trash produced from lunch packaging.

Try these alternative packing ideas. In place of ...

- plastic bags use reusable containers for food items
- plastic wrap or bags use reusable sandwich wraps and snack bags
- paper towel or napkins use a cloth napkin
- disposable utensils use reusable utensils (stainless steel, bamboo, etc.)
- paper bags use reusable lunch boxes or bags
- individual single-serving portions buy in bulk
- drink boxes or disposal beverage items use reusable drink containers (e.g., thermos)

Often purchasing smaller quantities of a product increases the grocery bill, while purchasing in larger quantities (one big bag of carrots instead of single serving carrot bags) can save you money. Also, continuing to buy disposable products can be more expensive than investing in reusable items.

Source: University of Florida, IFAS Green Team Members Jenny Seitz and Annie Oxarart

Supermarket Savings Tips

It's possible to save money shopping for groceries without cooking everything from scratch, packing your purse with coupons, or purchasing food in season. Here are seven handy tips:

1. **Staple food stock up.** Invest in staple foods when they're on sale. Buying a boatload of bananas (and other perishable foods) isn't a very good long-term investment. Stocking up on staple items such as reduced-price canned tuna, tomato sauce or mandarin oranges can be. Remember to check expiration dates.
2. **Think before you drink.** Buy a reusable water bottle and fill it with tap water. Your investment soon will pay for itself. Limit consumption of soft drinks and fancy coffees.
3. **Costly convenience foods.** How much time do you really save when you buy a convenience food? It takes just a few seconds to mix your own sugar and cinnamon rather than buying it pre-mixed. Microwaving a bowl of regular oatmeal rather than pouring hot water over a pre-measured package adds only a few minutes. You're likely to save by cutting fruits and veggies yourself. Plus, the pre-cut ones won't keep as long.
4. **Bulking up when the price is right and you can use it.** First, do the math and check if you actually do save by buying a larger package. The cost of two foods of the smaller size may be a better price than the larger one. Plus, will you use the food while the flavor is still tasty? Always check it out and if the larger size meets your criteria, go for it!
5. **Store brand savings.** Store brands are comparable in nutrition to name brands. And, taste-wise, there may be little difference. In some comparisons, they have been preferred over the name brands.
6. **Shop the specials.** Plan your menus around sale items, especially more expensive purchases, such as meat. A dollar saved is even better than a dollar earned, as you don't have to pay taxes on it! Buying several packages of meat when it is on sale and freezing it may save quite a bit. "It is safe to freeze meat or poultry directly in its supermarket wrapping but this type of wrap is permeable to air," advises the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service. "Unless you will be using the food in a month or two, over-wrap these packages as you would any food for long-term storage using airtight heavy-duty foil, freezer plastic wrap or freezer paper, or place the package inside a freezer plastic bag."
7. **Brown bag it.** If you normally eat out at noon, consider brown bagging it at least one day a week. The typical fast food meal out easily can cost \$5.00 or more. Take food left over from the evening meal to work the next day. A peanut butter sandwich and a piece of fruit quickly can be packed from foods on hand.

Source: University of Nebraska Extension, Lancaster County, Lincoln, Nebraska

Don't Let Food Safety Practices Go Down the Drain

Tips for keeping your sink germ-free

Most folks clean their kitchen countertops frequently, but the sink — that catch-all for food preparation — doesn't receive the same careful attention. Preventing foodborne illnesses is important for the health of all family members. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, each year in the United States there are approximately 76 million incidents of illnesses, 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths, all a result of foodborne maladies.

The first step toward preventing foodborne illnesses is to keep both hands and food preparation surfaces clean. This includes the sink!

Sanitary Sinks. In today's kitchens, sinks are made from a variety of materials, each with its own requirements for cleaning and disinfecting.

Cast iron: Clean with an all-purpose, antibacterial cleaner. Rinse thoroughly and use a soft cloth to wipe the product dry after each use. To disinfect, use a solution of one part chlorine bleach to 16 parts water.

Ceramic: Clean with an all-purpose, antibacterial cleaner. Rinse thoroughly and use a soft cloth to wipe the product dry after each use. To disinfect, use a solution of one part chlorine bleach to 16 parts water.

Stainless steel: Clean with hot, soapy water. Avoid abrasive cleaners, as they may scratch the surface. If the surface looks dull or cloudy, moisten a soft cloth with undiluted white vinegar and wipe clean. To disinfect, wipe the surface with a solution of one part chlorine bleach to one part water. Rinse immediately and wipe dry with a soft cloth.

Copper: For basic cleaning, use mild soap and water. Because abrasive materials and chemicals can harm the copper, avoid letting dirty pots and pans sit in the sink for an extended period of time. To help protect the surface, treat it periodically with a wax that is specially designed for copper. Since copper is a natural antibacterial surface, it isn't necessary to disinfect it.

Engineered stone, such as soapstone: Use an abrasive or nonabrasive cleanser. To disinfect, wipe the surface with a solution of one part chlorine bleach to one part water. Rinse thoroughly.

Hygienic Hands. Clean hands are another factor in the prevention of foodborne illnesses. Hands should be washed before beginning any food preparation, as well as after handling raw meats, fish and poultry. Here's how to clean those hands.

1. Wet hands with warm, running water. Then apply soap.
2. Rub hands together vigorously to make a lather, and scrub all surfaces. Continue for 20 seconds, which is about how long it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice through.
3. Rinse well under warm, running water.
4. Dry hands thoroughly using paper towels or an air dryer. If possible, use a paper towel to turn off the faucet.

Source: The Soap and Detergent Association

Save Time and Hassles with USA.gov

We all lead busy lives, so who couldn't use a website that puts hundreds of the best resources at your fingertips? Such a website does exist, and you'll never guess who runs it — Uncle Sam! It's filled with links that will save you money, time, hassles, and maybe even your sanity. Just go to USA.gov, the federal government's official web portal, where millions of federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial web pages have been gathered into one easy-to-search website.

On USA.gov you'll find links to take care of lots of tasks on your to-do list. Renew your driver's license or passport, get a copy of your marriage certificate, change your address, or find a farmer's market near you, all from the comfort of your home and without spending any gas money.

Having parenting resources in one place is a big time-saver, too. Sure, you probably have your favorite parenting blogs, magazines, and websites. But you probably don't have a single site with links to car seat fitting station locators, recalls, vaccine guides, food stamp information, state deadlines for student financial aid applications, or car safety comparison information. Who knew the government had all this and more! There are even resources for adoptive parents and grandparents raising grandchildren.

When the pressure's on to feed your family, USA.gov's American recipe list in the "Health and Nutrition" section is a great resource. Serve your kids Mrs. Truman's Mac and Cheese or another recipe from a famous American. Or find recipes for farmer's market veggies, heart healthy recipes, soy cookbooks, thrifty meal ideas, and even regional recipes.

But USA.gov offers more than links to other websites. Find answers to your government questions using the "FAQs" (Frequently Asked Questions) link at the bottom of any page — there are more than 2,000 answers packed with information. If that's not enough, click on "Contact Us" to e-mail your questions or comments, and you'll get a response within two business days. Or get instant gratification and chat with a specially-trained information agent who can help you. Just select the "Chat" link at the top of any page Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time.

Whether you're looking for a fun diversion, like genealogy resources listed by state, or need help finding a government job or surplus property auction, visit USA.gov today — it's government made easy.

Source: www.pueblo.gsa.gov/press/usagovsummer08.htm

Whey Protein: Nutritional Powerhouse

Even if you are not an elite or serious athlete you may have heard about the benefits of consuming whey protein for its effect on body composition, improving the immune system and helping with weight management. The following information from the Dairy Council of California will give you some background information on whey protein.

Whey protein: what is it?

Whey is one of the two major proteins found in cow's milk, comprising about 20% of total milk protein. Whey proteins, which refer to a group of individual proteins, contain water, lactose, protein, minerals (calcium, phosphorus, magnesium) and fat. Depending on how it is produced, whey protein contains different levels of these nutrients.

What are the benefits of whey protein?

The best known effects of whey protein are its ability to help promote weight loss, increase lean muscle mass and boost the immune system.

Whey protein contains high levels of essential and branched-chain amino acids which have been shown to help people maintain or build muscle tissue. This can be important for athletes, people trying to lose body fat and older adults concerned about maintaining their muscle mass. Whey protein may also help with weight loss by increasing feelings of fullness and maintaining blood glucose at constant levels.

Whey proteins boost the immune system by helping the body produce an antioxidant called glutathione. Glutathione protects against free radical damage, pollution, toxins, infection and sunlight exposure. Adding whey protein to the diet may help protect health in people of all ages.

How much do I need to consume for these benefits?

Generally about 20-25 grams per day of whey protein is adequate to reap the benefits for body composition, weight management and immunity benefits. Athletes in training or competition may need more, 40-50 grams per day, to replace the proteins burned in exercise and to help repair and build new muscle tissue. Remember that whole food sources of protein such as milk and dairy foods, meat and legumes are still important for the other nutrients that they provide beyond protein.

How much total protein do I need in my diet?

The recommended protein intake is a hotly debated issue in the nutrition community. Many experts feel that the current recommended dietary allowance (RDA) of 0.8 grams per kilogram body weight (0.36 grams per pound) is too low, particularly for athletes and those with special medical needs. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommends that protein intake comprise 10-35% of total calories — a range intended to take into account an individual's different needs as a result of age, weight, gender, activity level, medical needs, health goals, individual preference and lifestyle.

Where can I buy whey protein?

Many grocery stores carry whey protein in their nutritional supplements section. In addition, it can be purchased at health food stores or on the internet. When choosing a supplement, make sure you read the label and purchase products that contain WPI (whey protein isolate) or WPC 80 (whey protein concentrate 80%); these indicate that the whey protein is in a more highly concentrated form. A quick way to compare products is to divide the number of grams of protein per serving by the total number of grams per serving. If lactose is a concern, select whey protein isolate which contains little or no lactose.

How do I use whey protein in my diet?

Whey protein products come in various forms – powder, nutritional bars or beverages. Think about your diet and identify the easiest way to add these products without changing your favorite foods and habits. For example, whey protein powder can easily be added to a morning shake or smoothie. It can be stirred into yogurt, cottage cheese, juice or sports drinks, mashed potatoes, instant oatmeal, or sprinkled on breakfast cereal. The powder can be used as a protein fortifier in meatloaf, soup, sauces and instant pudding.

Source: Dairy Council of California

Top 10 Ways to Enjoy Spinach

1. Always on the move? Tear spinach leaves, toss into a whole wheat pita with your favorite salad toppings. Add low fat dressing for a quick salad on the go.
2. Take cooked frozen spinach and mix into mashed potatoes. Top with parmesan cheese for a Popeye-approved twist on an old favorite.
3. Try spinach in a stir-fry. Cook spinach, bell peppers, onions, mushrooms, and broccoli in a little olive oil on high heat for a delicious vegetable medley.
4. Sauté spinach with some garlic in olive oil for a great side dish to any meal.
5. Add chopped spinach to lasagna or soup.
6. Use spinach as a wrap. Place grilled chicken in a spinach leaf and dip into low fat ranch dressing.
7. Add sautéed spinach to your favorite pasta dish.
8. Add spinach, mushrooms, onions and low fat cheese to make a yummy filling for omelets and frittatas.
9. Add to sandwiches and burgers instead of lettuce.
10. Use fresh spinach to make a salad. Toss in some strawberries, mandarin oranges, or apple slices for an added kick.

Source: Produce for Better Health Foundation

Get Punchy Without Alcohol

Whether it's rum punch or a glass of wine, plenty of alcohol flows during the holidays, right through midnight on New Year's Eve. But taking it easy with the alcohol isn't just a word to wise drivers. It's a good idea for anyone to limit alcohol for good health and lower cancer risk.

Researchers have linked regular alcohol to head neck and liver cancers, and believe it may be a culprit in higher risk for colon, rectal and breast cancers.

Alcohol affects men and women differently. A woman's body has more fat and less muscle than a man's. Alcohol can be diluted in water-holding muscle tissue, but not in fat tissue. That means alcohol lingers in a woman's bloodstream longer so the health risks for cancer, liver disease or injury to an unborn child are greater.

It can be challenging to rein in drinking in a social setting – but these strategies might help you make one drink last longer:

- Start with a non-alcoholic drink. When you do drink alcohol, choose a wine spritzer (wine mixed with club soda), a low-alcohol beer or a drink that is diluted with fruit juice or soda and ice. Take small sips of any drink so a little lasts a long time.
- Eat when you drink. Perhaps save your alcoholic beverage to drink with dinner so you are not drinking on an empty stomach. Food will slow alcohol's effects and take the focus off just having a drink.
- If you are a host, set filled water glasses next to every plate on the dinner table. Use small glasses to serve wine and other alcohol. Always provide plenty of non-alcoholic choices for your guests.
- If you're a guest, offer to bring a fruity punch to the party for everyone. Spike it with something special like sparkling cider, an unusual fruit juice or fruit nectar.

Punches can be a chance to get creative. Mix up a warming drink, like hot apple cider diluted with an equal amount of ginger-flavored tea and spiced cinnamon for "wassail," a word derived from the Norse phrase, "Be in good health."

If making a cold punch, unsweetened frozen and thawed fruits, like strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and cherries are usually packaged with some juice and can be pureed in a blender to use as punch ingredients. Dilute them with club soda and 100% juice.

Source: American Institute for Cancer Research

Do You Owe Money to the IRS?

The vast majority of Americans get a tax refund from the IRS each spring, but what do you do if you are one of those who have received a tax bill? What do you do if you owe money to the IRS and can't pay.

The IRS encourages you to pay the full amount of your tax liability on time. If you get a bill for late taxes you are expected to promptly pay the tax owed including any additional penalties and interest. It is often in your best interest to get a loan to pay the bill in full rather than to make installment payments to the IRS. You can also pay the bill with your credit card. The interest rate on a credit card or bank loan may be lower than the combination of interest and penalties imposed by the Internal Revenue Code.

You can pay the balance owed by credit card, electronic funds transfer, check, money order, cashier's check, or cash. To pay by credit card contact either Official Payments Corporation at 800-2PAYTAX (also www.officialpayments.com) or Link2Gov at 888-729-1040 (also www.pay1040.com).

An installment agreement may be requested if you cannot pay the liability in full. This is an agreement between you and the IRS for the collection of the amount due in monthly installment payments. To be eligible for an installment agreement you must first file all returns that are required and be current with estimated tax payments. If you are an employer you must be current with your federal tax deposits.

If you owe \$25,000 or less in combined tax, penalties, and interest, you can request an installment agreement using the web-based application, Online Payment Agreement (OPOA), found on the Internet at IRS.gov. Or, you can complete and mail an IRS Form 9465, Installment Agreement Request, along with your bill in the envelope that you have received from the IRS. The IRS will inform you within 30 days whether your request is approved, denied, or if additional information is needed.

If an agreement is approved, a one-time user fee will be charged. The user fee for a new agreement is \$105 or \$52 for agreements where payments are deducted directly from your bank account. For eligible individuals with incomes at or below certain levels, a reduced fee of \$43 will be charged.

For more information about installment agreements and other payment options visit the IRS Web site at IRS.gov. IRS Publications 594 and 966 also provide additional information regarding your payment options.

Source: Internal Revenue Service

Tips to Prevent Lead Exposure

Lead poisoning is entirely preventable. The key is stopping children from coming into contact with lead and treating children who have been poisoned by lead.

The goal is to prevent lead exposure to children before they are harmed. There are many ways parents can reduce a child's exposure to lead. The key is stopping children from coming into contact with lead. Lead hazards in a child's environment must be identified and controlled or removed safely.

Lead-based paint is the major source of exposure for lead in U.S. children. All houses built before 1978 are likely to contain some lead-based paint. However, it is the deterioration of this paint that causes a problem. You should determine the construction year of the house or the dwelling where the child may spend a large amount of time (e.g. grandparents or daycare). In housing built before 1978, assume that the paint has lead unless tests show otherwise.

To reduce a child's lead exposure:

- **Create barriers between living/play areas and lead sources.** Until environmental clean-up is completed, parents should clean and isolate all sources of lead. They should close and lock doors to keep children away from chipping or peeling paint on walls. You can also apply temporary barriers such as contact paper or duct tape, to cover holes in walls or to block children's access to other sources of lead.
- **Regularly wash children's hands and toys.** Hands and toys can become contaminated from household dust or exterior soil. Both are known lead sources.
- **Regularly wet-mop floors and wet-wipe window components.** Because household dust is a major source of lead, parents should wet-mop floors and wet-wipe horizontal surfaces every 2-3 weeks. Windowsills and wells can contain high levels of leaded dust. They should be kept clean. If feasible, windows should be shut to prevent abrasion of painted surfaces or opened from the top sash.
- **Prevent children from playing in bare soil; if possible, provide them with sandboxes.** Parents should plant grass on areas of bare soil, or cover the soil with grass seed, mulch, or wood chips. Until the bare soil is covered, parents should move play areas away from bare soil and away from the sides of the house. If using a sandbox, parents should also cover the box when not in use to prevent cats from using it as a litter box. That will help protect children from exposure to animal waste.

Source: CDC Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Florida Food Fare

by Mary King

Family & Consumer Sciences

University of Florida / IFAS

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Lemons

Description: The lemon, *Citrus limon*, apparently originated in northwestern India, though little is known about its origin and subsequent spread. It is believed to have been brought to the New World by Columbus in 1493. This bright yellow fruit is oval in shape, with a pronounced bulge on the blossom end. The flesh is pale whitish-yellow or greenish-yellow, juicy, highly acid with few to no seeds. It can range in size from that of a large egg to that of a small grapefruit.

Availability: A lemon tree flowers continuously and has fruit in all stages of development most of the year. A single tree may bear as many as 3,000 lemons annually. They are available fresh, year round in the supermarket, as are frozen and bottled lemon juice.

Nutritional Value: Though the lemon is an excellent source of vitamin C, it begins to lose its vitamin power soon after it's squeezed. Lemons are low in calories and sodium and fat and cholesterol free. One lemon, approximately 108 grams yields 21 calories, 83 mg vitamin C, 65 mg calcium, 156 mg potassium, 5 g dietary fiber and 32 IU vitamin A.

Selection and Care: Choose fruit with smooth, brightly colored skin with no tinge of green. Lemons should be firm, plump and heavy for their size. Avoid product that is soft, spongy, wrinkled or has bumpy, rough or hard skin. Medium to large sized lemons are generally better quality. Depending on their condition when purchased, they can be refrigerated in a plastic bag, in the vegetable/fruit crisper for 3 to 4 weeks. At room temperature they will keep for about a week.

Preparation and Use: Throughout the years lemons have been popular fruit for their culinary and non-culinary uses. They are used in more ways than any other citrus fruit. The juice is used in flavoring foods such as sauces, salads, desserts, beverages, fish and poultry. It is also used as a bleach; it removes odors and prevents some fruits from turning brown after being cut. The oil is used in flavoring and in making perfume, medicines and cleaning products, to name a few. The rind can also be cooked with sugar to make candied lemon peel or grated fresh to add flavor and zest to recipes

Recipe:

Fresh Lemonade

4 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

1 cup chilled club soda or plain water

1 teaspoon superfine sugar

3 or 4 ice cubes

Combine lemon juice and sugar and stir until sugar is dissolved. Add soda or water and stir. Put ice cubes in glass and pour lemonade over them. Serves 1.