Make 1 Resolution and Stick with It

Pedometer can help you increase steps

Although the world looks a little bare after the holiday decorations are put away, there is something comforting about getting back into routines.

The urge to organize and accomplish amazing things is always strong this time of year. Instead of making a long list of resolutions that aren’t likely to be kept, pick just one.

A good one is to buy a pedometer and wear it constantly. The pedometer becomes your accountability partner.

If you’re new to using a pedometer, wear it for a few days to determine your normal level of activity. Then set a goal to increase by a specific amount. How much depends on your current level of health and fitness.

For some, adding 500 steps is reasonable. For others, adding 100 is appropriate. Once you can easily maintain the increased steps, set a new goal with more steps.

A healthy adult should aim for 10,000 steps daily. Try to reach 12,000-15,000 if you are walking as part of a weight-loss program.

March is National Nutrition Month

March is National Nutrition Month and is sponsored annually by the American Dietetic Association.

The 2010 theme is “Nutrition from the Ground Up.” The campaign focuses attention on the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits.

“We can build healthier diets and start down a path of health and wellness by choosing nutrient-rich foods that provide the most nutrients per calorie,” LSU AgCenter nutritionist Dr. Beth Reames stresses. “The nutrient-rich foods way of eating emphasizes choosing foods based on their total nutrient package, including vitamins and minerals, instead of choosing foods based only on what they don’t contain – saturated fat, sugar and salt.

“It offers a positive foundation to help build overall healthier eating habits and meet nutrition needs over a lifetime.”

Choosing nutrient-rich foods first is a positive and realistic way to think about eating and focuses on enjoying food instead of avoiding it. Selecting nutrient-rich foods and beverages first is a way to make better choices within your daily eating plan. Choose first among the basic food groups from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s MyPyramid food guide:

- Brightly colored fruits and 100 percent fruit juice
- Vibrantly colored vegetables and potatoes
- Whole, fortified and fiber-rich grain foods
- Low-fat and fat-free milk, cheese and yogurt
- Lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, beans and nuts

For additional information about eating healthfully, contact an LSU AgCenter Extension agent in your parish or visit www.LSUAgCenter.com. Several LSU AgCenter state and field faculty members also are members of the American Dietetic Association.

Beth Reames, Ph.D., LDN, RD
March 25, 2010, is American Diabetes Alert Day – an annual, one-day, wake-up call to inform the American public about the seriousness of diabetes.

The American Diabetes Association encourages people to take the Diabetes Risk Test and find out if they, or their loved ones, are at risk for developing Type 2 diabetes.

The risk test is available from the American Diabetes Association online at www.diabetes.org or by calling 888-DIABETES.

National statistics show that 23.6 million children and adults in the United States have diabetes, and nearly one-quarter of those do not know they have it. One in five Americans is at risk for developing Type 2 diabetes. According to the 2000 Louisiana Health Report Card, an estimated 365,000 or 8.4 percent of Louisiana residents 20 years and older have diabetes. Of those, thousands have undiagnosed diabetes. (5.7 percent of the state’s population have been diagnosed with diabetes, while an estimated 2.7 percent have it but haven’t yet been diagnosed).

For many people, diagnosis may come seven to 10 years after the onset of the disease. Early diagnosis is critical to successful treatment and delaying or preventing some of its complications such as heart disease, blindness, kidney disease, stroke, amputation and death.

Everyone should be aware of the risk factors for Type 2 diabetes. People who are overweight, relatively inactive (living a sedentary lifestyle) and over the age of 45 should consider themselves at risk for the disease. African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans and people who have a family history of the disease are at an increased risk for Type 2 diabetes.

Diabetes is a serious disease that affects the body’s ability to produce or respond properly to insulin, a hormone that allows blood glucose (sugar) to enter the cells of the body and be used for energy. Diabetes is the fifth deadliest disease in the United States and it has no cure.

Healthy eating is important for managing diabetes. Tips from the American Diabetes Association for making healthful food choices include:

- Eat lots of vegetables and fruits.
- Choose whole grain foods over processed grain products. Try brown rice with stir-fry or whole-wheat spaghetti with pasta sauce.
- Include dried beans (like kidney or pinto beans) and lentils in meals.
- Include fish in meals two to three times a week.
- Choose lean meats like cuts of beef and pork that end in “loin,” such as pork loin and sirloin. Remove the skin from chicken and turkey.
- Choose nonfat dairy products such as skim milk, nonfat yogurt and nonfat cheese.
- Choose water and calorie-free “diet” drinks instead of regular soda, fruit punch, sweet tea and other sugar-sweetened drinks.
- Choose liquid oils for cooking instead of solid fats that can be high in saturated and trans fats. Remember fats are high in calories. If you’re trying to lose weight, watch your portion sizes of added fats.
- Cut back on high calorie snack foods and desserts like chips, cookies, cakes and full-fat ice cream.
- Eating too much of even healthful foods can lead to weight gain. Watch portion sizes.

For more information about eating healthfully, contact the LSU AgCenter Extension agent in your parish or visit www.LSUAgCenter.com.

Beth Reames, Ph.D., LDN, RD

What Not to Give Up If You Want to Lose Weight

Many of us want to lose weight after the holidays, and some of the first foods we will give up are carbohydrates: breads, pasta, potatoes and rice. We need carbohydrates for energy, however.

Our brain alone needs about 4 ounces of carbohydrates a day for it to work well. So if you go on a very low carbohydrate diet and experience headaches, confusion and listlessness, it might be because your brain does not have adequate energy to function.

What kinds of carbohydrates should you have? Choose whole grain bread instead of white bread. It has a lot of fiber and loads of great phytochemicals that delay aging and chronic diseases. The same is true for pasta and rice. Choose whole grain pasta and rice instead of refined grains. The fiber in whole grain breads, pasta and rice will give you an added feeling of fullness.

What about potatoes? Potatoes are an excellent food. It is what we put on them that makes them “fat.” A small baked potato, about 2 inches in diameter, has about 130 calories. A medium baked potato, about 2½ to 3 inches in diameter, has about 160 calories. A large baked potato, about 3½ to 4 inches in diameter, can have about 275 calories. As for the “additions,” however, butter and sour cream have about 100 calories a tablespoon, and 1 ounce of cheese has from 105 to 115 calories.

As you can see, you can double the calories of a baked potato just by adding the butter, sour cream or cheese. So how should you flavor the potato without adding fat and calories? Try chopped onions. Either chives, green onions or red onions give a nice flavor without any fat and calories. Also, you can experiment with herbs. Find one that you like and mix it in while the potato is still hot to maximize the flavor.

Potatoes have a lot of vitamin C and the B vitamins. The type of fiber potatoes have crystallizes after it has been chilled to what is called resistant starch. Resistant starch has been shown to reduce body fat, particularly abdominal fat and moderate blood insulin and glucose levels.

So don’t give up carbs when you want to lose weight. Make smart choices instead by choosing whole grain products and watch what you put on them to cut down on calories and fat.

Heli Roy, Ph.D., LDN, RD
Many of us seek shelter indoors during the winter, but we may be missing out on some great benefits of the sun.

Vitamin D is produced in our skin when we get unprotected exposure to the sun (without sunscreen). Though we certainly want to take precautions against overexposure, we need at least 10 minutes of exposure three times a week for the necessary conversion of vitamin D to take place.

UV rays are weaker in the winter in many parts of the country, but not here in Louisiana. Talk to your health care provider about unprotected sun exposure. Not everyone in the medical community thinks that even a little sun is a good idea, because of the risk of skin cancer.

Food can provide vitamin D, but it may be difficult to get 1,000 international units (IU) of vitamin D from your diet alone. It is not found in many foods, and growing numbers of researchers think we are not getting enough. Only a few foods, such as fatty fish, liver and egg yolks, actually contain vitamin D naturally. Other foods, such as milk and cereal, are fortified with vitamin D. Check the nutrition facts label on yogurt, though, since many are not fortified with vitamin D.

Most multivitamin-mineral supplements contain 400 IU of vitamin D. Many supplements contain a form called D2, which is a less potent form of vitamin D. It is also less expensive. You are better off using a supplement that contains D3, which is made from fish oil, lanolin or a chemical conversion of cholesterol. This form is much better absorbed by the body, but it can be more expensive. Check the supplement label or inquire with supplement manufacturers to find out whether they use D2 or D3 if the label does not specify. Vitamin D also is often added to calcium supplements, due to its complementary role in bone health. Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin, so take your supplement with a meal containing some fat to enhance absorption.

A deficiency of vitamin D goes beyond bones. It can cause numerous health problems.

Because it is a hormone, vitamin D also plays a role in the prevention of many ailments. Emerging research suggests that vitamin D has an anti-cancer benefit. It may stop the growth and progression of cancer cells and be beneficial during cancer treatment, too. Vitamin D is most strongly associated with colon and prostate cancers, but it may also protect against breast, lung, ovarian, stomach, bladder, esophageal and kidney cancers. More research is needed for conclusive evidence in these areas.

Vitamin D influences the functions of hormones involved with diabetes, blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, depression and premenstrual syndrome. Some research shows that a vitamin D deficiency can interfere with the “fullness” hormone leptin, which signals the brain you are full and should stop eating. Vitamin D has powerful anti-inflammatory effects and helps control the inflammation involved with periodontal disease, rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis. It also plays a role in a strengthening your immune system, especially in autoimmune disorders, when the body attacks itself, like multiple sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis.

Research shows that as we age we do not absorb vitamin D as well, and since we are all at different stages of the process, it is difficult to standardize how much is needed by each of us. The bottom line is to shoot for 700 to 1,000 IU of vitamin D a day. Expect only 40 to 150 IU of vitamin D in most foods that are fortified with vitamin D.

Whether we choose to get a little sun, eat foods containing vitamin D, take a supplement or a combination of these, it is worth the effort.
The 30 Million Word Catastrophe

There is a 30 million word catastrophe occurring across Louisiana in our families with very young children. But this 30 million word gap – the catastrophe – affects all of us.

The difference in language experience of young children has vast implications for children individually as well as all of us collectively as a society. Our future and our children’s future quality of life hinges upon addressing this 30 million word gap.

There is a profound difference in the language experience young children who are born into professional, working class or poor families. The difference is two-fold. It comes both in the overall amount of words heard and in the proportion of positive, encouraging words heard.

Optimal early language experience has a causal relationship with a higher IQ and larger vocabulary by age 4. Of course, we know higher IQ and larger vocabulary size have been linked to greater school achievement.

Early language researchers Betty Hart and Todd Risely have conducted a decade of in-depth, longitudinal research and have found a dramatic difference in the amount of words heard by a young child during the first three years life. By age 4, average children of professional parents heard 30 million more words than children of poor parents. Further, the magnitude of language experience was found to be linked to school achievement through the fourth grade.

Hart and Risely also discovered that the tone of the words heard by children during the first three years was significantly different. Their study revealed that by age 4 children of professional parents heard a six-to-one ratio of encouragements to discouragements. Children in working class families heard two encouragements for every one discouragement. Conversely, children of poor parents heard only one encouragement for every two discouragements. The tone of the language experience of a child was also found to be linked to school achievement outcomes through the fourth grade.

This research highlights the need for programs that help parents and early caregivers learn to talk more to very young children and to use more encouraging words when talking to young children.

In response, the LSU AgCenter has begun to implement The Little Bookshelf program. Parents are supported in developing the habit of reading daily to their babies and providing positive parent-child time focused on encouraging and informative language experiences.

To accomplish this, we provide poor parents of newborns a small library of books for them to read to their babies throughout the first year of a child’s life. The program provides parents and babies access to books they might not have otherwise due to family economic conditions. Parents routinely reading to babies has been shown to have many positive effects – including strengthening the parent-child bond and expanding a child’s vocabulary.

The late educator and poet Gabriella Mistral may have put it best. “Many things we need can wait. The child cannot,” she said. “Now is the time his bones are formed, his mind developed. To him we cannot say tomorrow, his name is today.”

It is important to help parents know and understand their children’s education cannot wait until the children begin school. We all must help parents and early caregivers realize they are the first and most important teachers children have and encourage them to take action in the very early years of a child’s life to help him or her develop language.

Linda Robinson, Ph.D

Read A Love-Themed Storybook to a Young Child in Your Life

Celebrate Valentine’s Day this year by reading a great book to your child, grandchild, niece, nephew or another child in your life.

There are many wonderful books that are love-themed from which parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and other caregivers can choose.

• Some things to keep in mind when selecting a book to read to children are:
• It sounds good when read aloud.
• If a rhyming book, it reads naturally and comfortably.
• It is interactive.
• It has interesting language and exposes the child to new vocabulary.
• The illustrations are engaging and match the book text.
Looking Out for ‘Tweens and Teens’

As children grow up, their social world expands to include friends, neighbors, classmates and friends of friends. Their relationships with others, as well as their use of modern technology and media, constantly expose them to new ideas and experiences.

Some of these ideas and experiences are very positive and rewarding; but others may put young people in those in-between or teen years at risk for a variety of negative outcomes, such as substance use, delinquency and early sexual activity. How can parents help keep their older children and adolescents safe while respecting the ‘tweens and teens’ needs for increased independence?

Children are less likely to engage in risky behaviors when their parents monitor their activities. Parental monitoring consists of knowing where your child is, what your child is doing and with whom.

A powerful example of the importance of monitoring is described in a recent study of serious teen violence. Children who had a history of problems in elementary school were more likely to commit serious violent acts as teens if their parents failed to monitor them during middle school.

Parents often base their decisions about the need for monitoring on the information their children disclose. The extent to which parents should rely on their children for information depends upon each child. A child who tends to be honest, dependable and trustworthy may need less supervision than a child who is experimenting with risky behaviors.

Parents also can monitor their children by getting to know their children’s friends and the friends’ parents. How similar are your values and beliefs about appropriate activities? I once listened as the mother of a teenage daughter described a party she had hosted at their home in which the mother provided a keg of beer. She rationalized that she would at least know how much the teens had consumed, and she did not seem concerned one of the teens had passed out from drinking too much.

Children are more likely to talk openly and honestly with their parents about their relationships and activities when they feel loved, nurtured and respected by their parents. When parents are perceived as harsh, punitive and controlling, children are less likely to share their experiences and concerns. A close parent-child relationship provides the trust and security children need to seek guidance in making difficult decisions or facing the consequences of poor choices.

Sources:

Linda Robinson, Ph.D.
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Tips for Avoiding Foreclosure Rescue Scams

Louisiana homeowners have faced lower foreclosure rates than those of most other states. But indications from the Federal Reserve Board of rising rates of mortgage delinquencies could cause an upswing in Louisiana mortgage foreclosures.

As the number of people who need help keeping their homes increases so does the number of con artists trying to take advantage of these people.

The Federal Reserve Board offers the following tips for avoiding foreclosure rescue scams:

Work only with a nonprofit, HUD-approved counselor. If you are looking for help to prevent foreclosure, consult a housing counselor that is on the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s list of approved agencies. Visit HUD’s website for a searchable list, or call 877-HUD-1515 (877-483-1515) for more information. If you are approached by foreclosure counselors—by mail, phone or in person—make sure the counseling agency is HUD-approved before you do business with it.

Don’t pay “an arm and a leg.” You should not have to pay hundreds—or thousands—of dollars. Most HUD-approved housing counselors provide no-cost or low-cost counseling services. Do not agree to work with a counselor who collects a fee before providing services or who accepts payment only by cashier’s check or wire transfer. In general, do not pay money to anyone unless you know exactly what services you will receive.

Be wary of “guarantees.” A reputable counselor will not guarantee to stop the foreclosure process, no matter what your circumstances. Working with a legitimate counselor can certainly increase your chances of keeping your home, but be wary of people who promise a sure thing. Again, get the details of your transaction, along with any promises, in writing first.

Know what you are signing and be sure you sign only what you intended to sign. Don’t let a counselor pressure you to sign paperwork you haven’t read carefully or that you don’t understand. Don’t sign any blank forms or let “the counselor” fill out forms for you. Be sure to talk with an attorney before signing anything that transfers the title of your home to another party.

If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

If you feel you may be the target or victim of foreclosure fraud, trust your instincts and seek help. For tips on spotting foreclosure rescue scam artists, visit the Federal Trade Commission’s Web site at www.ftc.gov. Also, report suspicious schemes to the Consumer Protection Section of the Louisiana Attorney General’s office by visiting www.ag.state.la.us.

Reference: Federal Reserve Board

Jeanette Tucker, Ph.D.

10 Questions, 10 Minutes

That’s what it takes for the official 2010 census

The 2010 census will be one of the shortest questionnaires in history. The survey only asks name, gender, race, ethnicity, relationship to others in the household and whether you rent or own your living space.

Although April 1 is the census day, households will begin receiving their forms in March. Questions should be answered based on the status on April 1.

It is extremely important that every citizen be counted. Census data is used to determine legislative districts, distribute state and federal funds, determine school districts and attendance zones and aid in planning for everything from transportation to health care services. Businesses use census data to determine potential customers, labor pools and local trends.

Questions about how we live, which used to be on the long form used by the census, are now collected annually through the American Community Survey.

Do your part and fill out your form. While you’re at it, encourage others to do the same.

For more information or answers to questions you may have about the census, check the Web site at www.2010census.gov.

2010 CENSUS: IT’S IN OUR HANDS
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Shown here:
2010 Get It Growing Calendar
A Guide to Louisiana-Friendly Landscapes
Louisiana Home Vegetable Gardening Guide
Serving Louisiana Cookbook

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Living Well

Information and education at your fingertips to help you live well. Brought to you by your family and consumer sciences professionals through the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences.

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Contact your local AgCenter office for additional information.