Living Well with Stephanie

January, February, March 2014
Newsletter

A note from Stephanie

WOW! Another year has is upon us, 2013 flew by there were many changes and I know many more to come!
As we bring in 2014 with this COLD weather, let us also bring in health lifestyle changes. Don’t just make resolutions that you will forget about in the weeks to come, but challenge yourself to make positive lifestyle changes!
Challenges encourage us to fight to overcome and achieve our goal! Set goals to live healthier, more financially sound lifestyles. Be sure to take time to enjoy your life, your family and your friends this year!

As always, remember to move more, eat healthy, keep your food safe and manage your finances in order to stay out of debt. Inside this edition of “Living Well with Stephanie” find interesting articles and information on programs that will help you do just that! Please feel free to contact me with questions about future programs, or feedback on the newsletter.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Parker-Helmkamp
Associate Area Agent, Family and Consumer Sciences

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Exercise is king. Nutrition is queen. Put them together and you’ve got a kingdom.

~Jack Lalanne
February is American Heart Month

February is American Heart Month. This month is donated to raising awareness about heart disease and to help enhance research that will help save lives. A special date to remember in the month of February is the 7th, National Wear Red Day, in order to show your support for heart disease prevention awareness.

Heart disease is the number one killer of both men and women in the United States. “Heart disease is a disorder of the blood vessels of the heart that can lead to a heart attack” says the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. Heart disease is dangerous because there is no cure for heart disease and once it has set in, the disease will only worsen unless changes in your daily life are made. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, every year about 715,000 Americans will have a heart attack and about 600,000 people will die from a heart attack. These statistics are very alarming but there is something that can be done to help prevent the development of heart disease. Many risk factors that are associated with the development of heart disease are controllable while others are not. Risk factors for heart disease that can be controlled include high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, smoking, being overweight, and being physically inactive. Others that cannot be changed include age, and family history of early heart disease. Even though there are risks associated with heart disease that cannot be controlled, remember that there are things you can do to help lower your chances of developing the disease. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention suggest the following to decrease the chances of developing heart disease:

- Eat a healthy diet
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Participate in regular physical activity

- Know your NUMBERS
- Monitor your blood pressure
- Have your cholesterol checked every 5 years
- Don’t smoke
- Limit alcohol use
- Effectively manage your diabetes
- Take your medicine – if your health care provider has prescribed.

By taking these easy steps you can decrease the risk of developing heart disease tremendously.

Hertford County Cooperative Extension has several programs that help to promote cardiovascular disease (including heart disease and stroke) prevention and management. Two such programs are Eat Smart, Move More, Take Control and Give Your Heart a Healthy Beat. If you are interested in more information regarding either of these programs please contact the Extension Center at 358-7822.

-Information for article was taken from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention website and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute website.
The Jolly Green Giant of Spring Vegetables

One of the first – and most treasured – delicacies of spring is fresh asparagus. Although not a traditional Southern food, the diversifying population of North Carolina and the revival of culinary sophistication and healthy eating, prompted in part by the local foods movement, ensure asparagus its place at the table. These tender beauties always remind The Produce Lady that delicious springtime produce is back.

Nutrition – Asparagus is historically known as a medicinal food. The Greeks believed asparagus was an herbal medicine, which, among other things, would cure toothaches and prevent bee stings. Claims for medicinal benefits of asparagus persist to this day, most likely because there is truth to the nutritional attributes of asparagus. It is a nutrient-dense food, which is low in calories, high in fiber, rich with potassium and a good source of folic acid. The vegetable contains vitamin B6, vitamins A and C, and thiamin. A five-ounce serving (about five spears) has no fat, contains no cholesterol and is low in calories and sodium. Anyway you cut it, asparagus is a key ingredient in a healthy diet.

Selection & Storage – Asparagus can be found in many N.C. farmers markets during the spring months. You may be accustomed to the green stalks, but keep an eye open for special varieties of asparagus that may be purple or white when shopping the market. Contrary to popular perception, size is not an indication of tenderness, color is the best gauge of asparagus quality. When selecting green varieties, a brighter green color is a sign of goodness. Remember, “green is for go.” The tips should be closed and compact while the cut ends will be moist. Firm stalks are another indicator of good quality asparagus. One pound of chopped asparagus yields about three cups, so make sure to shop smart and buy enough. To store, stand the fresh stalks in an inch of water (or wrap the cut ends in wet paper towels) to maintain freshness. As with most fresh produce, keep asparagus refrigerated until time to prepare. Asparagus will keep for a week to 10 days with little loss of quality.

Preparation – Before preparing, gently rinse the asparagus in a large bowl to remove any soil. Break off the tougher part of the stem near the bottom where it snaps naturally. Although asparagus is usually cooked, it can be eaten raw with a dip or as part of a salad or vegetable tray. This versatile vegetable is good grilled or roasted until lightly browned; steamed or boiled in a small amount of water just until crisp tender; and even microwaved in a covered dish with water for three to five minutes. Remember that asparagus will continue to cook for a while after it is removed from the heat. To stir-fry asparagus, cut the stems diagonally into one-inch pieces, leaving the tips whole, and cook with a little oil for three to five minutes. For more information – visit www.theproducelady.org

- Article and recipe taken from The Produce Lady at www.theproducelady.org.

Healthy Recipe:

Asparagus Cheese Toast

INGREDIENTS:
- ¼ lb. asparagus
- 4 slices bacon
- 1 small onion, diced
- ½ lb. sharp cheddar cheese, grated
- 1 egg, beaten
- 2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tbsp. tomato sauce
- Black pepper, freshly ground
- 6 slices bread, toasted

DIRECTIONS:
Trim asparagus, cut diagonally into ½ inch pieces, you should have about one cup. Cook bacon in frying pan, drain well on paper towels. Add onion to bacon grease in pan (if using low-fat or turkey bacon, add oil) and sauté until wilted. Add asparagus and stir-fry for two minutes, until crisp tender. (If using leftover asparagus, slice it as directed above and do not cook any further.) With a slotted spoon, transfer asparagus, onion to a mixing bowl, discarding as much bacon grease as possible. Cut cooked bacon into bits and add to bowl along with grated cheese. In a separate smaller bowl, mix together beaten egg, Worcestershire sauce and tomato sauce. Pour into cheese mixture and blend well. Add pepper. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Divide asparagus-cheese mixture evenly and spread on toast slices. Place on aluminum foil in a jelly-roll pan. Bake for 10 minutes, then, place under the broiler briefly to brown the top.
Testing Your House for Radon:  The health risk associated with exposure to radon is lung cancer. In fact the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) ranks radon a more serious threat than lead paint, PCBs, dioxins and asbestos combined. The risk of someone getting lung cancer from radon depends on the level of radon and how long a person is exposed.

Lung cancer takes many years to develop. Even if you have radon levels that are higher than normal, you will have enough time for follow-up tests and time to decide what corrective measures are needed. Radon is measured in units called picocuries per liter of air (abbreviated pCi/L). The EPA has set an “action level” of 4 pCi/L. This means that the EPA recommends action lowering indoor radon levels higher than 4 pCi/L. A level of 20 pCi/L has about the same risk as smoking one pack of cigarettes a day. The average radon level in U.S. homes is about 1.3 pCi/L.

In addition to the health risk, radon may cost you money. In some cases, real estate companies or buyers will not consider a house unless a radon test has been completed. If you plan to sell your house, test for radon first.

What is radon? Radon is a naturally-occurring radioactive gas. It is produced by the normal breakdown of uranium in the soil. As radon breaks down it produces radioactive particles. If you breathe in these small particles and they lodge in your lungs, they will continue to emit radiation. Radon can be present in masonry building products or in well water, but the radon in the soil as a soil gas is by far the most common source of indoor radon problems. Radon is also present in outdoor air, but at very low levels. How does radon get into your house? It enters through tiny cracks in building materials like concrete blocks and through larger cracks and holes like floor drains. Household appliances like exhaust fans, gas heaters, and wood stoves create the forces that draw radon into a house.

In North Carolina indoor radon levels are generally lowest in the coastal plain area and higher in piedmont and mountain areas. However, the coast is not free of radon. Radon levels are known to vary from place to place, even in the same neighborhood. Two similar houses side by side could have very different radon levels. This is why the only way to know the radon level in your house is to test.

How is radon measured? Fortunately, testing for radon is relatively easy, and you can do it yourself. There are several ways that you can test for radon in your house. The most common way is a short term measurement. A short-term test gives you a “snapshot” of the radon levels in your house during the time the test was made. Short-term test are also called screening tests. Screening tests give a quick and inexpensive indication of whether a house has high levels of radon. Charcoal canisters, the most common, devices used for screening tests, are usually left in place for 2 to 7 days. At the end of the test period, the canister is sent to a lab, which analyzes the canister for radon and sends a report back to you with the results. Charcoal canisters are low in cost (about $10-$20) and are easy to use.

Long-term testing is usually done with an alpha track detector. The results give a more average assessment of radon levels in your house. Aloha track detectors consist of plastic film inside a small container. A lab analyzes the film and sends you a report indicating the radon level. Long-term testing with alpha track detector is done over a period of several months to a year. Alpha track detectors are easy to use and cost between $15-$40. Radon professionals may use other radon detectors. These detectors cost much more than either charcoal canisters or alpha track detectors and require specialized training. They can read radon levels without being sent to a lab. Whether you choose a charcoal canister or an alpha track detector, carefully follow the instructions that come with the test device. In most cases, instructions will tell you how long it should be left in place, what data you need to record before and after the test what house conditions are needed, and where to place the device. One of the questions most asked is “Where… continued on page 6.
Energy Conservation: Save Money and Stay Warm this Winter

Take steps now to improve energy efficiency during the home heating season. Energy dollars can pour out of homes through leaky doors, windows, and un-insulated attics, walls, floors, and basements. Most winterizing investments pay for themselves relatively quickly with lower heating bills. Weather-stripping and caulking are inexpensive and among the simplest, most effective ways to boost efficiency and cut energy costs year round. A small investment now can pay big dividends in keeping your home warm this winter. Don’t overlook simple energy-saving steps that are low cost – or no cost:

★ Set your thermostat as low as is comfortable this winter. Turn down the thermostat when you go to bed, leave for work, or when you will be away for an extended period of time. According to the Department of Energy’s Energy Savers, setting your thermostat 10 to 15 degrees lower for eight hours can save you up to 10 percent on your annual heating and cooling costs.
★ Wear multiple layers of clothing and warm socks and slippers inside. Dressing warmly will help you stay comfortable while your thermostat is set a little lower.
★ Make sure a throw blanket is located within easy reach when relaxing.
★ To reduce water-heating costs and water bills, lower the temperature of the water heater to 120 degrees F and install low-flow water restrictors on showerheads and faucets. Repair all leaky faucets.
★ Replace or clean the furnace filter according to manufacturer’s instructions. Check the filter at least once a month and replace when dirty. Dirty or clogged filters can reduce the efficiency of the system and block air circulation. If you have pets, you may need to change your filters more often.
★ Use drapes, blinds, curtains, or shutters on all windows to reduce heat loss through the glass. To maximize thermal energy from the sun, open window coverings during sunny days and close them at night to keep heat inside.
★ Use kitchen and bathroom vent fans sparingly during the winter to minimize the heated air that escapes to the outdoors.
★ Make certain that furniture and window coverings don’t block air flow from supply ducts and air returns. Arrange the sitting area so that sofas and chairs are away from drafty windows.
★ Close the damper and the glass doors on the fireplace when not in use.

- Article taken from the Fall 2009 edition of the NC State University Extension’s Successful Family newsletter.

Upcoming Programs:

For information on upcoming programs please visit us online at http://hertford.ces.ncsu.edu/

Or contact Stephanie at 252-358-7822.
Testing Your House for Radon continued...

should I place the detector? You need to place it where your family spends time. Don’t put one in the crawl space or a basement with a dirt floor. Detectors for short-term (screening) tests should be placed on the lowest lived-in level of a home. For long-term tests, a detector should be placed on each story. Detectors should be placed at least two feet above the floor, out of sunlight or drafts from fans or vents. Whichever method you select, buy a detector that meets EPA standards. Look for the EPA statement on the detector package.

What do my results mean? The lab analyzing your device will report what the radon levels were during your test. Keep in mind that the EPA “action level” is 4pCi/L. If your level was less than 4pCi/L, your test result is considered low and more testing is optional. If your test indicated a level more than 4 pCi/L, EPA recommends follow-up testing on all levels of your house. For results over 20pCi/L you should complete short-term testing on all levels of your house and consider actions to lower radon levels. Test results over 200pCi/L demand immediate attention to lower radon levels.

How are radon levels lowered? Reducing radon levels may be as easy as opening crawl space vents or as involved as hiring a radon contractor. Methods may include sealing radon entry routes, ventilation, or removing radon in the soil underneath the home. Before you decide to lower levels, you should complete an initial test and a follow-up test to confirm the initial test results.

Where can I get more information? For more information you can visit the NC Radon Program website at ncradon.org As always you can contact your county extension center for assistance.

Article taken from the NC Cooperative Extension Service – Family and Consumer Sciences website at the following address http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/pdfs/insite1.pdf

National Health Observances:
January, February, March

January:
- National Birth Defects Prevention Month
- National Radon Action Month
- National Glaucoma Awareness Month
- Radon Awareness Month

February:
- National Wear Red Day, February 1
- National Donor Day, February 14

March:
- National Nutrition Month
- National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

For more information about the Hertford County FCS program
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