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News Release

Extension Offers Cooking Smart Cooking School

Are you looking for ways to “brush” up on your cooking skills or perhaps gain new skills in 2012? The St. Clair County Extension office is proud to offer two sessions of Cooking Smart, a cooking school that provides hands-on learning in the kitchen while preparing tasty foods based on simple and healthy cooking methods. The goal of the program is to teach parents and/or grandparents the knowledge and skills needed to prepare healthy meals at home to balance their calorie intake, which is essential for weight management and obesity prevention.

Cooking Smart keeps it simple - simple preparation methods, simple ingredients and simple equipment. Each session contains several basic cooking techniques and other topics related to eating and preparing meals at home. The program also provides tips for stretching your food dollar while eating healthy.

The first Cooking Smart cooking school will be held on Friday, January 20th. The same class will be offered again on Friday, February 24th. Both classes will be held from 9 a.m. til 3 p.m. in the St. Clair County Extension Office Auditorium, located on the lower level of the St. Clair County Courthouse in Pell City. The registration fee is \$10.00 which covers recipes, educational materials, and lots of food samples. Space is limited to 18 per class. To register, please call the Extension office at (205) 338-9416 or visit our website at www.aces.edu/StClair to download a registration form to send in with payment. Please pre-register before Wednesday, January 18th.

Preparing and eating more meals at home is a big step towards eating healthy. Eating at home means having more control over what we eat and how much we eat. When we eat at home or carry food with us from home, we usually eat healthier – more fruits and vegetables and less calories. Also, enjoying meals at home is important to achieving and maintaining a healthy weight.

Eating smart at home isn't about a fancy sit-down or gourmet meal. Preparing simple meals at home takes about as much time as driving to a fast food restaurant or ordering a pizza. Here are a few helpful tips to get you started to cooking smart and eating smart:

Plan for simple meals. Set aside 30 minutes to plan for the next week. Make a list of the main dish and the side dishes that you will serve for each day of the week. Post the menu on the refrigerator and have your family participate in the planning.

Keep a favorite meal list. Start by keeping a list of the things your family likes to eat. This list can help you as you plan for each week. If you try a new recipe that everyone likes, don't forget to add it to the list. Keep the master list taped inside the kitchen cupboard or on the computer.

Get input from your family. Use your list of everyone's favorite foods, including main dishes, salads, vegetables, fruits and desserts. Look in cookbooks, newspapers, websites or magazines for quick main dish and side dish ideas. Add them to the list. Keep a file of recipes on the computer, in a recipe file, or loose-leaf notebook.

Select simple recipes. Select recipes with few ingredients. Prepare one-pot entrees. Stir fry meat and then add veggies to create a meal in one skillet. Serve it over rice or pasta. Bake or roast meats and veggies in the oven. Simple cooking techniques include: slow-cookers, microwave meals, toaster ovens, steamers, and grills. Canned and frozen fruits and vegetables are fast, healthy additions to any meal.

Use a shopping list. Using a list helps you remember the things you need. When you stick to your list, you won't buy things you really don't need. A grocery list is essential to keeping foods stocked so that you can prepare easy and healthy meals for the week ahead. Start by checking what foods you have and then list the things you need. Check the pantry, refrigerator and freezer. Write down everything you need. Clip and organize coupons only for the foods you will use. Check expiration dates on the ingredients.

For more information about this class or other nutrition-related topics please contact regional Extension agent and dietitian, Jennifer Dutton, at the St. Clair county Extension office at (205) 338-9416 or email jld0021@aces.edu.