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# Metro News

*...Making Extension Connections*

## Jump Starting a Healthier You in 2012

By Jannie Carter, Extension Assistant Director

Congratulations! You survived the holiday season and celebrated the transition into another year. What an accomplishment! Reflecting back on all that was gained from 2011, perhaps the best gift any of us can boast about having received would be good physical and emotional health. Because there is always room for improvement, however, moving forward into a productive 2012 means accurately assessing where we are in relation to our current health and vowing to make changes as needed. So, how did you fair? Were you vigilant and consistent with your pledge to stay healthy and wise? Did you do your part to help make Alabama healthier by honoring your previous resolutions?



Well, in spite of all we did or didn't do, unfortunately the most recent statistics continue to show Alabama ranked as the second most obese state in America with over 32% of the adult population classified as obese. Furthermore, figures show more than 68% as overweight or obese combined, which translates to more than 3 million people. With the cost of obesity and associated illnesses averaging over 50 million dollars annually for every 100,000 citizens in high rate cities, we can no longer afford to be overweight and unhealthy.

So, don't lose heart; good health is not out of reach for Alabama citizens. Three simple watch phrases for a better year in 2012 are moderate exercise, healthier food intake, and adequate rest. Yes, you've heard it all before, but the success lies in applying what you already know.

Exercise is not optional. Sedentary lifestyles are off the radar for 2012. Starting with just 10,000 steps per day can get you on a regiment that could have long term benefits for respiratory fitness and blood pressure control, not to mention the calories burned. It's not hard. There are so many opportunities throughout the day even for those who work a full 8 hours to get in exercise by planning your steps. Walk around the work place, park your car at a distance from your office location, take the stairs, or use your break to walk the corridors. What's most important is that you create your own routine and stick with it. If you have trouble staying on course with good exercise, team up with a partner who will keep you on track. Let's just get moving!

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## Detoxing the Body

By Wendi Williams, Editor & Extension Communications Specialist

The global community has taken a greater interest in becoming healthier. That's a good thing because people are living longer, and in order to have the option of living independently in our own homes or in a retirement village, it's important for us to take care of our health. Living a long and healthy life usually involves preventative care through a physician, getting adequate rest, exercising, and eating healthy foods.



Nonetheless, have you ever noticed that many of the popular diet or exercise programs require you to first "detox" your body? But what does detoxing your body really mean and is it really necessary?

### What are Toxins?

Toxins are chemicals or poisonous substances that adversely affect our bodies internally or externally, and are generally categorized as exogenous (made outside of the body) or endogenous (made inside the body) (DBK, n.d.). Exogenous toxins may include bacteria, pesticides, smoke, alcohol, drugs, parasites, and preservatives. Endogenous toxins may include carbon dioxide, urea, and lactic acid that your body normally produces.

Toxins are generally filtered through our lungs, kidneys, and the liver, and eventually eliminated through the urinary tract, the colon, the lungs, or the mucous membranes in the nose and ears. Naturally, the body reacts when too many toxins accumulate in the body causing anything from the growth of a tumor or cyst to physical joint pains, fatigue, headaches, mood swings, and a slower metabolism (DBK, n.d.).

### Human Anatomy and Toxins

As stated previously, our bodies naturally process and eliminate toxins on a continuous basis. For example:

- The lungs help to expel carbon dioxide.
- The liver filters toxins in our blood. It also produces bile that helps to eliminate waste and fat in the small intestine during digestion (OSUMC, n.d.).

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Literally, the job needs to fit the worker by making the employee comfortable enough to perform his or her tasks.

## Health & Safety: Desktop Computer Usage

By Jean Hall Dwyer, Extension Communications Specialist

Currently, more than 66% of the jobs in America involve extensive use of computers on a daily basis by young and old workers alike and in offices as well as factory settings. In fact, most employees interact periodically with computers during the workday. So, with the amount of time workers spend in front of computers, the following safety tips may help to prevent usage problems.

Computers aren't dangerous, but they can be used in ways that prove to be harmful. To stay healthy, one important factor to keep in mind is the **ergonomic layout** of work surroundings. Literally, the job needs to fit the worker by making the employee comfortable enough to perform his or her tasks.

To be ergonomically sound, the first area to focus on is the workstation: the computer (monitor, keyboard and mouse), chair, desk, anti-glare screen, document holder, printer, and other equipment. With so many computers being used and so little attention being paid to the ergonomic design of the workstation, increasing numbers of avoidable health issues related to vision and body aches and pains have resulted. Fortunately, most of these problems are temporary and can be solved by using simple corrective measures such as proper computer set up (monitor and keyboard placement), adequate rest breaks that incorporate some physical activity, and ergonomic controls of the office environment, including furniture design, configuration and layout, office lighting, and glare control.

Improper computer set up can lead to musculoskeletal problems ranging from neck and back aches, muscle fatigue, and cumulative trauma disorders like carpal tunnel syndrome. These problems are caused by badly designed workstations that can cause one or more of the following issues: staying in an unnatural posture for prolonged periods of time while using the computer; performing repetitive movements for an extended period of time, such as turning your head to view a poorly placed document; or maintaining inadequate lower back support.

Ideal specifications for ergonomic offices and workstations include the following:

- Adjustable to elevate, swivel, and tilt (use books to elevate if needed)
- Place no higher than your eyes at the top line or lower than 20° below the horizon of your field of vision
- Same level and beside the document holder if you use one
- Positioned between 18-24" away from your face

### Keyboards

- Placed directly in front of the monitor and at the same height as the mouse
- Adjustable (legs to adjust angle)
- Placed to allow the forearms to stay parallel to the floor without raising the elbows
- Placed to allow the wrist to stay in line with the forearm so that it doesn't flex; 2" of a well-padded wrist rest that runs the length of the keyboard is nice

### Office Chair

- Support the back with special attention given to the lower back
- A height adjustment that can be used with the user seated
- Allow the back crease of the knee to be slightly higher than the pan of the chair seat, otherwise use a footrest, 12-inches deep and 20-inches wide, tilted to 10-20° to elevate the feet to a comfortable position

### Desk

- Should have enough leg room for your footrest and to allow periodic leg movement to avoid stiffness
- Adequate surface area to support the computer equipment, documents, and other necessary items
- Should be at least 30 inches in depth to allow for adequate distance from your eyes to the monitor (at least 24 inches)
- Keyboard trays, if used, should have an adjustable height option as well as forward and back tilt features; be large enough to use the keyboard AND mouse comfortably; be retractable for storage; and clamp and lock under the work surface to avoid accidents



Support the back with special attention given to the lower back

## Detoxing the Body

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The kidneys help to remove waste and drugs in the body, while balancing our bodily fluids.

These bodily functions are also important in determining how our body stores fat, sugars, or impacts our metabolism, which are essential in maintaining a healthy weight. This is why many diet and exercise programs recommend following a detox regimen for a certain number of days.

### How to Detox Naturally

First, do your homework and consult your physician before starting a detox plan. You don't want to do anything that might put your health at risk. While there are many detox plans available, Dr. Group from the Global Healing Center listed these items among the top ten foods that aid in detoxing your body naturally.

- **Fruits:** Most fruits contain a large amount of water. They also have vitamin C that turns toxins into waste that is easily digestible. Fruits like lemons, oranges and limes help to flush toxins. Lemons appear on the menu of many detox plans.
- **Green foods and raw vegetables:** Foods like spinach or greens contains a green pigment called chlorophyll that reduces the effect of environmental toxins in our body. You can purchase liquid chlorophyll at health food stores and it's known to reduce body odors and improve the health of the circulatory, digestive, immune, and detoxification systems. Some vegetables contain sulphur and glutathione that aids in breaking down toxins. Also, green tea contains an antioxidant called catechins that helps the liver to function properly.
- **Mung bean and Omega-3 oils:** The mung bean, a more common staple in Asian countries, and foods that are high in Omega-3 absorb toxins in the intestine, which allows them to be easily digested and eliminated from our bodies.

### And when all else fails:

- **Water:** In a Mayo Clinic article (2011), it was suggested that men drink about 13 cups daily and women drink about 9 cups daily. However, in most dietary literature, it is advised that we drink at least 8 cups of water a day. Water helps to flush fat and remove toxins.

### The Benefits of Detoxing the Body

There are many detox plans out there including regimens that concentrate on cleaning the colon or detoxing the liver, for example. In many ways a detox program has similar benefits to fasting. Other than the obvious benefit of removing toxins, it can help your body to function better. When the body functions better it is more likely to dispense of toxins and waste more easily. When waste is easily removed, then it's bound to aid in weight loss. Also, detoxing the body has been known to increase energy levels.

**Note:** *Whether you decide to detox or not, be sure to talk it over with your doctor first.*

## Health & Safety: Desktop Computer Usage

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### Document Holders

- Adjustable to fit either side of the monitor
- Sturdy enough with a wide lip to support stacks of paper or books, if necessary
- Should have an adjustable line guide for data entry purposes

### Office Design

- Glare reducing curtains or blinds
- Plants in the office or a humidifier to maintain a healthy level of humidity
- Intensity controlling lighting; or at least the option of task lighting, not just overhead florescent lighting
- Physical placement of desks, chairs, cabinets, and other office furniture to allow adequate surroundings to perform work in an efficient and effective manner without having to contort the body

These suggestions should help you get your workstation and office set up to be more ergonomically friendly. But remember to seek medical attention if you have continued discomfort even after adjustments to the work environment have been made, or if you experience throbbing, tingling, numbness, a burning sensation, or stiffness in your muscles or joints. Seek help even if these symptoms occur away from your computer or work environment.

Once you have an ergonomically designed workstation and office, there are still more tips that will help workers to use their computers in a healthy and safe manner. For example, vision problems plague many computer users with complaints ranging from visual fatigue, to blurry or double vision, a burning or tearing of the eyes, headaches, and even a frequent need for changes in prescription eyeglasses.

There are several simple things that can be done to lesson vision problems. Check the contrast setting on your computer to see if you can find one that is more comfortable for your eyes. Keep your screen, clean—those fingerprints and dust need to go! Take frequent breaks by looking away from the screen for 10 seconds or so—look out the window or at a photo on a far wall. If you have a monitor that flickers, contact the IT department and get it repaired or replaced!

Any fatigue you are experiencing may be lessened by frequent (hourly) five-minute breaks to get up and take a brisk walk around the building. If you take this walk outside, you'll relieve your eyestrain even more. This little break will not only reduce eyestrain and fatigue, it will lift your spirits, help you get into better physical shape, might help you lose a few pounds, and it can help you live longer too!

Also, every effort should be made to reduce glare in the office (closing blinds or turning down lights that cause a bright light to shine on your face as you look at the monitor OR that produces reflections on the display screen). One source of glare that you may not realize is your own clothing! If the lighting is just right in your office and you are wearing a white top, you may be causing a lot of glare on the screen. If that's the case, avoid wearing white to work!

## Health & Safety: Laptop Computers

By Jean Hall Dwyer, Extension Communications Specialist



Keep a good posture at all times with back supported and wrists in line with forearms.

As discussed in a related article in this issue, *Health & Safety: Desktop Computer Usage*, computer usage in the business world is currently at more than 66% of all workers. Yet, research findings show that almost 60% of adults are using their portable devices (laptops and phones) to access the Web away from the office, and mobility is even more important for younger adults such as college students and young professionals. "In 2005, laptops outsold desktop computers for the first time ever...by 2015, 70-80% of workers could be, at least partially, working away from the office," (NHS, 2010). This growing addiction to mobility lends itself to its own set of health and safety problems focusing mostly on the ergonomically poor design of the laptop computer.

Since the laptop is designed for portability and not for the comfort of the user, neck, back, shoulder, wrist, and eye problems will often result. Also, laptops are often used in some of the most wretched of work environments from crowded coffee shops to trains to cars to the beach (a fun place to be, but not to work). These locals do not allow the user to work comfortably for an extended period of time.

With smaller keyboards and attached screens, differing pointer devices or mice, and no adjustability to anything, working on a laptop gets cramped and frustrating very fast. The neck and eyes can start hurting from the closeness of the screen and the angle or the glare. The wrists and hands will cramp up from the small keyboard and use of the frustrating pointing device. Whatever position that has been assumed in order to work on the laptop will cause the shoulders, back, and/or legs to cramp up if you've been holding the laptop in your lap—watch out! It gets real hot very fast!

### Tips for Laptop Comfort

- Keep a good posture at all times with back supported and wrists in line with forearms.
- Keyboard and screen should be in line with your body just like with a desktop.
- Avoid glare and keep screen clean.
- Don't use a laptop in your lap by placing it on a table or some books.
- Rest your eyes every now and then. Look away from the screen & blink often.
- Take a five-minute break every hour, walk around a little, but don't leave your laptop unattended!
- Whenever possible, if your only computer is going to be a laptop, have an auxiliary monitor, mouse, and keyboard at least at your home station (docking port to plug into). Such peripherals are fairly inexpensive and well worth the cost for what they'll save you in medical bills.
- There is a slight extremely low frequency (ELF) radiation problem with laptops. ELF is the same radiation people are exposed to from TV screens and other electrical appliances. Few studies have shown any association between laptop radiation and health problems. More problems have been associated, however, between the heat produced by the laptop and sperm production. Therefore, it is best not to actually work with the laptop in your lap. Also, this may block the air vents and overheat the laptop.



"In 2005, laptops outsold desktop computers for the first time ever...,"  
(National Health Service, 2010).

### Tips for Laptop Safety

- Always use a desk when working on your laptop!
- Always shutdown the laptop when not actually using it to keep it from overheating.
- Never store the laptop when it's is turned on! The storage bag has no circulation and you could fry your computer.
- Set your laptop to hibernate or to go into standby mode after idling to save power.
- Check your vents every week. Used canned air to blow them out. Do NOT poke anything into the air vents!
- Check the fan. If yours never clicks on and your laptop runs hot, check with your IT department or a computer repair service.
- Do NOT rest your laptop on soft material when operating it like the top of a bed. This does not allow it to vent properly and it will overheat.
- Unplug accessories when not in use even for a short time since they draw power and can cause the laptop to overheat. Do not pack the laptop with accessories plugged in to avoid overheating and draining your battery.
- When choosing a laptop, pick one that is lightweight with a long-life battery and a large screen.

Choosing a combination of these specifications within your price range is ideal for laptop safety.

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## *Jump Starting a Healthier You in 2012*

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**Focus on healthy food intake.** Breakfast is still the most important meal. So, start the day with a good nutritious breakfast to stay energized. Control the sugars in your diet and eat more fresh fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables provide fiber to fill you up and reduce the likelihood of over snacking on high calorie foods.

**Get your rest.** Experts are sharing more about the importance of rest to good health. A lack of adequate sleep can lead to health problems including a lack of energy and weight problems. Sleep needs vary, but on average 8 to 10 hours are ideal for older children and adults. Stress, physical problems, and poor sleep habits can contribute to restlessness. Help keep your rest pattern under control by developing a regular schedule that will get good results for you and allow you to wake up alert and productive.

Take time in 2012 to focus on your health. It may be one of the most important things you do for yourself. And remember, good health is wealth!



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