Finish What You Start!
By Dr. Jannie Carter, Extension Assistant Director

How many times have you started a health and nutrition routine to put yourself on the right road to a healthy lifestyle, but somehow lost the momentum and got off track? Well join the ranks of millions of Americans who want to do the right thing but just can’t seem to finish what they start. Educators and health experts alike continue to search for the formula that will encourage a lifetime commitment to better health. But there is no magical formula; the answer lies within each of us individually to know better and to do better.

The reasoning behind the push for healthy lifestyle choices is rather obvious. Research attributes some 20 percent of deaths in the United States to improper diet and lack of exercise. The childhood obesity rate continues to rise, and more than a third of American adults are overweight. Adults and youth in obese and overweight categories are at particular danger of developing high-risk diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, arthritis, and some forms of cancer. But this is not news. We hear the statistics and the warnings over and over and we resolve to do something. The natural response is to go on a diet, obtain a spa membership, or start an exercise routine. And then after a few weeks, what happens? We fall off the wagon.

Of course someone has to take the blame. So, we blame it on our commitment to get things done for work and family leaving no time to concentrate on ourselves and our health. We even blame it on the food industry and the availability of quick and easy choices that fit our time schedules and budgets, but may not be the healthiest choices. But the truth is there are no bad foods, just poor choices.

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Childhood Obesity Epidemic Continues to Rise
By Dr. Donnie Cook, Extension Health & Nutrition Specialist

Obesity is an epidemic affecting millions of people around the world and it continues to rise. Individuals with a body mass index score greater than 24.9 increase their chances of being diagnosed with a chronic disease such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and some forms of cancer. Approximately, two-thirds of adults and one-fifth of children in the United States are considered overweight or obese.

Currently in the United States, 16.3 percent of children and adolescents between the ages of 2 and 19 are classified as overweight or obese. Overweight is defined as weighing too much, whereas obesity means having too much body fat, resulting from an imbalance between energy intake and energy output. However both terms mean that a person’s weight is greater than what is considered healthy. Being obese or overweight can reduce your life expectancy and eventually impact other medical, physiological, and psychological conditions.

Childhood Obesity Facts
- Overweight and obese children and adolescents are more likely to develop type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, asthma, liver damage, orthopedic problems, arthritis, and skin conditions.
- Childhood obesity contributes to an early onset of puberty.
- Overweight and obese individuals have higher incidences of high cholesterol and elevated blood pressure levels.
- Sleep apnea in overweight and obese children affects learning and memory.

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Have you ever walked passed someone and they smelled like cigarette smoke? Or have you rented a car and it smelled like cigarette smoke? If you answered yes to these questions, then you have been exposed to “third-hand” cigarette smoke.

So what exactly is third-hand cigarette smoke? Third-hand cigarette smoke is a new name for an old problem. Researchers from across the country have determined that third-hand cigarette smoke is the tobacco smoke residue or chemicals that remain after the cigarette has long been extinguished. These toxins can build up over time. The term is also used to describe an invisible yet toxic brew of gases and particles that cling to a smoker’s hair, clothing, furniture, walls, and carpet long after the smoker has exited the room (Rabin, 2009). For instance, one cigarette will coat the surface of a certain room or automobile and a second cigarette will add another coat. Each time someone smokes, more smoke gets trapped in that area. The chemicals from the trapped smoke pollute the air and eventually our lungs.

Why be concerned about third-hand cigarette smoke?
In 2006, the United States surgeon general reported there was no “risk-free” level of tobacco exposure. There are 250 poisonous toxins found in cigarette smoke and smoking creates more than 200 poisonous gases, many of which are carcinogenic in nature. Among the most dangerous are chemicals like cyanide, ammonia, lead, arsenic, and radioactive compounds like polonium-210 (Kern, 2009). For years, the dangers associated with first- and second-hand cigarette smoke have been expressed to the public. Health problems like asthma, emphysema, lung cancer, and death are just a few of the health hazards linked to smoking (Science Daily, 2008).

Third-hand cigarette smoke poses the greatest health risk to children, especially those who live in homes with smokers. Young children who crawl or climb onto contaminated surfaces and play with contaminated toys often ingest toxins when they place their hands in their mouths.

Similar to low-level lead exposure, low levels of tobacco particulates have been associated with cognitive deficits among children and the higher the exposure level, the lower the reading scores (Science Daily, 2008). Currently, many of the dangers associated with third-hand cigarette smoke are unknown. However, it is clear that cigarette smoke and the chemicals associated with it are dangerous to anyone exposed to them (Martin, 2009; Rabin, 2009).

In conclusion, here are some helpful reminders concerning the protection of human health and wellness as related to smoking.

- To protect your family and home environment, smoke outdoors and wash your hands after smoking. Remember, smoke also coats your skin, clothing, and hair.
- Clean rooms subjected to smoking and all their contents, especially those belonging to small children.
- Or it might just be easier to just stop smoking!!!

Finish What You Start!
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“Double sizing” without exercising is a health threat. The keys to healthy food choices are simple: choose in moderation, respect portion sizes, watch the labels for dietary content, follow dietary guidelines, and do not consume more calories than you burn off. The bottom line is that it’s our responsibility to be in tune with our individual prescription for physical health and to make the right choices to meet our nutritional needs.

But just knowing the right thing to do does not always get the results we want or need. The biggest failure comes in not understanding that healthy living is more than just making a right choice now and then. It involves a lifelong process of making healthy choices that will not go away with a magical pill. Naturally, bad choices will be made but they should not become a way of life.
Finish What You Start!
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Consider this advice if you are convinced that it’s time for you to change your lifestyle for a better you. Take it one step at a time and deal with hurdles as you go. Don’t let them become stumbling blocks, but work around them at a steady pace. It won’t happen overnight, but consistency in your behavior can lead to routines that result in positive changes. Become physically active, make better choices, and encourage yourself. If your character is not that of a quitter, don’t start now. Finish what you start for a healthier you.

Childhood Obesity Epidemic Continues to Rise
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- Overweight adolescents are at greater risk of becoming obese adults.
- Overweight children are at an increased risk of being teased and bullied. They may also have low self-esteem and poor body image.

What can parents or guardians do?
In order to combat childhood obesity, parents and guardians can help children to:

- Change eating habits by limiting junk and fast foods, including foods high in fat content.
- Start a weight-management program.
- Plan meals and make better food selections like increasing the daily intake of fruits and vegetables.
- Control food portions and increase physical activity.
- Watch what they eat at school and limit their hours watching television or working on the computer.

Contact your local Extension office to find out more about good nutrition and health practices. You can also visit www.aces.edu or call Dr. Donnie Cook at 256-372-4983.

Ways to Add Physical Activity to Daily Routine
By Sylvia Oakes, Urban Regional Extension Agent

The American Heart Association encourages us to identify opportunities to add physical activity to our daily routine. Here are some tips to consider.

- Get off public transportation a few stops early and walk the rest of the way to your destination.
- In safe areas, park your car at the back, or on the lowest level of garages and parking lots to increase your walk or climb.

- Use the stairs instead of the elevator. To get started, ride the elevator to a midway point and climb the rest of the way. Add more floors as you build stamina.
- Walk to lunch spots at a distance from your office instead of always frequenting the corner café.
- Allow time to walk to meetings. If close by, walking can be faster and cheaper than taking a taxi or bus.

Tips for Workday Workouts

- Join a nearby health club and work out during lunch, or before or after work. A well-timed workout can give you a needed second wind. Consult your doctor before starting a physical exercise program.
- Take advantage of a speaker phone, and get up and move around during calls. Standing burns more calories than sitting down.
- Take a water cooler workout. Get up to refill your water cup. You need at least eight cups of fluids each day to keep hydrated.
- Enjoy activities with friends and family. Go dancing or bowling instead of to the movies.
- Sign up for a community sports team. You will have a chance to meet new people, have fun, and get in shape at the same time.
- Treat yourself to an aerobics class or try a low impact aerobics video at home.
- Don’t drive up to the supermarket. Carry your groceries to your parked car and unload the bags at home.
- If safe, walk within your apartment building using stairs to go between floors. You can walk for miles regardless of the weather.
- Lose your remote control. Get up to change channels on your television, to select a radio station, or to change a compact disk.

By adding more physical activity daily, you can increase your energy level, manage your weight, and reduce your chances of getting a serious health disease.
Using Home Quality Test Kits to Ensure Good Health and Wellness

By Dr. Karnita Golson-Garner, Extension Environmental Specialist

The safety of drinking water in Alabama’s urban centers is becoming a critical issue. Although public water supplies are tested and regulated to ensure safety, there is still increasing public concern. While there are many contributory factors, increases in non-point source pollution are largely responsible. According to Godbey (2008), many public drinking water supplies are laced with chemicals that are difficult to treat. Contaminants like heavy metals, pathogens, and pesticides are linked to acute and chronic human health problems ranging from neurological disorders to cancer. This is even more disturbing for those with small, private, and unregulated water supplies.

Notably, the presence of contaminants does not necessarily indicate that water poses a health risk. However, in order to ensure good health and wellness we must begin to lead a more environmentally conscious life. As homeowners we should work to promote environmental wellness, and a way to start is by testing the quality of the water in our homes.

"Water quality" is a technical term that describes the microbial, biological, chemical, and physical characteristics of water. It is based upon state and federal guidelines that describe what is suitable for human consumption and domestic use (USEPA, 2004). Even though testing is common, most homeowners assume they need special training or lots of money to test the water in their home. Actually, neither is required and a variety of companies offer inexpensive ($10 to $199) water testing kits that can be purchased at home improvement stores. Most of the kits contain everything you need to find out if your water contains unsafe levels of contaminants. It is important to follow the instructions carefully and to remember that acceptable contaminant levels vary widely among individuals and population groups (Zaslow & Herman, 1996).

What types of home water quality test kits are available?
- Test strips are inexpensive, chemical-free tests that offer quick results.
- Color comparators are more efficient than test strips and provide color-coded results that identify contaminants.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contaminants</th>
<th>EPA MCLs/MCLGs</th>
<th>Associated Health Effects</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bacteria</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Diarrhea, vomiting and cramps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead</td>
<td>&lt; 15 ppb</td>
<td>Hypertension, neurological and reproductive problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pesticides</td>
<td>&lt; 3 ppb (atrazine)</td>
<td>Birth defects, cancer and nerve damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 4 ppb (simazine)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitrates</td>
<td>&lt; 10.0 ppm</td>
<td>Blue baby syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitrites</td>
<td>&lt; 1.0 ppm</td>
<td>Blue baby syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chlorine</td>
<td>&lt; 4 ppm</td>
<td>Eye/nose irritation, stomach discomfort, and possibly cancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pH</td>
<td>Between 6.5 to 8.5</td>
<td>Aesthetic effects (taste)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardness</td>
<td>50-150 mg/ CaCO3/L/100mL</td>
<td>Skin irritation</td>
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Note: MCL = maximum contaminant level; MCLG = maximum contaminant level goal; ppb = parts per billion; ppm = parts per million
Using Home Quality Test Kits to Ensure Good Health and Wellness
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**What should I do if I observe unsafe contaminant levels in my drinking water?**
Notify your local health department or waste water treatment facility if unsafe contaminant levels are observed. Water purification systems and filters may also be installed to remove certain contaminants from your municipal or private water supply. Request a copy of the local annual consumer confidence report to learn more about the quality of your water. More information on water contaminants can also be found online at [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov).

Supporting efforts that protect water resources is a great way to ensure good health and wellness.

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**Getting in Good Financial Health**
By Dr. Bernice Wilson, Resource Management Specialist

Physical examinations and vital health screenings help you and your doctor to determine your health. The doctor gives you a report of the findings and tells you the state of your health based on what the numbers and examinations reveal. But did you know that numbers and observations also help to determine your financial health?

Credit reports and credit scores are based on numbers and procedures that lenders use to determine your financial health and creditworthiness. In other words, will you pay your debts if you are given credit or services? Your credit score is tied to information in your credit report. Your credit score will most likely change when information on your credit report changes. Your credit score helps a lender to decide what interest rate and size of loan will be offered, so your credit score is critical to your financial health.

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**Tips to Good Financial Health**
Unlike a physical examination, you don’t need a doctor to begin a financial self-examination. In many instances a financial self-examination can prevent you from becoming embarrassed or disappointed if you do not qualify for credit. Make these tips a part of your routine financial health examination.

- Get a free copy of your credit report annually from [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com). Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion are three individual reporting agencies or credit bureaus. You are advised to obtain a copy from each reporting agency at least once a year. You may want to get a copy of your credit report from each agency on a rotational basis every four months. For example, get a report from Equifax in January, a report from Experian in May, and a report from TransUnion in September. At the end of the year you will have annual reports from all three agencies.

- Specialty credit reports also determine your financial health. The Fair and Accurate Credit Transaction Act of 2003 has permitted consumers to obtain a free copy of specialty reports annually since December 1, 2004. The Federal Trade Commission ensures that organizations carry out this mandate. Specialty reports relate to medical records or payments, check writing history, residential or tenant history, and insurance claims. Consumers are advised to call toll-free numbers or a specific agency or company to obtain a copy of their free specialty credit report. Copies of your check writing, employment, and tenant histories may be obtained by calling:

  1-800-428-9623 - Check writing history
  1-866-312-8075 - Employment history
  1-877-448-5732 - Tenant history

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Review your credit score periodically. Credit scores are sold to lenders by each credit reporting agency. Lenders may obtain several types of credit scores such as the Fair Isaac Corporation (FICO) score and the VantageScore that was invented by each of the credit reporting agencies. However, FICO is still the most widely used system to determine your creditworthiness. FICO scores range between 300 and 850 with average scores falling between 600 and 700. Naturally, the higher the FICO score, the lower the lender’s risk. Lenders buy FICO scores from the three reporting agencies.

Factors that Influence Your Credit Health
The five factors that determine your credit health are:

1. Payment history accounting for 35 percent of FICO score;
2. Dollar amount accounting for 30 percent of FICO score;
3. Length of credit history accounting for 15 percent of FICO score;
4. New credit accounts making up 10 percent of FICO score; and
5. Mix of credit account types making up another 10 percent of FICO score.

You are considered to be in good financial health if your FICO is 700 or above. A FICO score below 600 is considered to be high risk and you run the risk of having your credit application turned down. Eighty-five percent of Americans score higher than 600 according to Glasner (2006); Singletary (2006).

The VantageScore system is used by the credit bureaus and is considered to be a relatively new credit scoring type that ranges from 501 to 990. Every 100 points corresponds with a letter grade in ascending order: 901 to 990 = A, 802 to 900 = B, 701 to 800 = C, 601 to 700 = D, and 501 to 600 = F. More than two-thirds of all consumers qualify for a grade of “C” or higher.

Remember there are several types of credit scores developed by credit reporting agencies, independent companies, and other lenders. Therefore, your credit score may differ from lender to lender because your credit history may differ from lender to lender. You can obtain your credit scores via the Internet, telephone, or by mail for a set fee.

In closing, credit reports and credit scores are important in determining your financial health. A financial self-examination is vital to your financial health, so do a checkup often. A good place to start is to develop and follow a budget. Practice these helpful tips to make sure you remain in good financial health.

Credit reports and credit scores are based on numbers and procedures that lenders use to determine your financial health and creditworthiness.

Specialty Reports
Consumers are advised to call a toll-free numbers or a specific agency or company to obtain a copy of their free specialty credit report.
Healthy People: What Lies Ahead?
By Wendi Williams, Editor & Extension Communications Specialist

The month of January ushers in a season of renewed commitments, and like many of you, I have observed how wellness has become more commercialized with the introduction of interactive electronic games and the onslaught of infomercials about fitness equipment, weight loss programs, or pharmaceutical drugs for almost any ailment imaginable. Now that a new year has arrived, I was curious about how our fair government was doing in regard to shaping the nation’s health and reducing health disparities that often plague Extension audiences.

In 1979, the United States Department of Health and Human Services launched the Healthy People initiative. Healthy People outlines a set of objectives issued every 10 years with the intent of improving the overall health of American citizens. Benchmarks further help to evaluate the effectiveness of these objectives as a way to ensure a healthier nation of people.

As a new decade begins, so does Healthy People 2020 (HP2020) that strives to build upon the progress our nation has made in improving America’s health over a 30-year span. In addition to previous Healthy People objectives such as reducing premature deaths and eliminating health disparities, HP2020 will help Americans to adopt healthier lifestyles across every stage of their lives, and to create and promote physical and social environments, particularly among our youth. The team that developed HP2020 included representation from such agencies as the Department of Education, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Justice, the Veteran’s Administration, and feedback from a panel designed to offer objectives for youth and young adults age 10-24. The overarching vision of HP2020 is to help all Americans live a healthy, long, and productive life!

As I get out my crystal ball and look into the future to Healthy People 2030, I predict that living healthy will become second nature in every area of our lives. For more information, please visit http://www.healthypeople.gov/hp2020.
About Metro News

Metro News is published quarterly by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System’s (Extension) Urban Affairs & New Nontraditional Programs (Urban Affairs) unit. The newsletter features Extension programming activities and relevant research-based information with an urban, nontraditional, and global focus for individuals, communities, and organizations.

Submissions

Electronic manuscripts are to be submitted to the editor at williw1@aces.edu by the first Monday of the preceding month of issue. January articles are due the first Monday in December; April articles are due the first Monday in March; July articles are due the first Monday in June; and October articles (anniversary issue) are due the first Monday in September. If these Mondays fall on a holiday, then articles are due on the first Tuesday following the holiday. Although articles are always welcome on any suitable topic for Extension audiences, we ask that you try to stick to the focus of a particular issue as follows:

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<td>Urban Gardening</td>
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Articles should not be longer than 750 words and should have at least three references formatted in APA style.

We appreciate your interest and support!

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