

Family and Community Health “Connections” in Taylor County



Better Sleep Month—Get the Sleep you Need

Better Sleep Month is observed during the month of May and aims to encourage healthy patterns of sleep and educate on the benefits of sleeping well. According to Amy Valdez, Texas A&M AgriLife Program Specialist, “sleep is just as important as including a well-balanced eating pattern and physical activity into our daily lives. It can have a great impact on our physical and mental health, and a lack of sleep can be detrimental”.

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Sleep Recommendations and Benefits

Sleep is a crucial part of our daily lives. It is recommended by the National Sleep Foundation that most adults should sleep for seven to nine hours every night. Getting in a good night’s sleep not only helps us feel energized and prepared for the next day but it can also aid in maintaining a healthy immune system and managing stress.

Insufficient Sleep, Oversleeping, and Concerns

In the United States, 1 in 3 adults are not getting adequate sleep. Insufficient sleep can play a role in various aspects of one’s health. Not getting enough can lead to increased risk of weight gain, depression, and certain chronic diseases such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Just as getting enough sleep as an adult can be an issue, so is too much sleep or oversleeping. Oversleeping can be linked to individuals gaining weight, experiencing depression, headaches, or backaches.

Tips on Getting a Better Sleep

- Exercise During the Day- Physical activity during the day can make it easier to fall asleep. Avoid exercise close to bedtime as this may have the opposite effect.
- Keep it Consistent- Aim to go to bed and get up at the same time each day. Keep a bedtime routine to allow your body to wind down.
- Prepare your Area for Quality Sleep- Sleeping in a room that is dark, cool, and has limited distractions can provide for a better night’s sleep. Ensure your sleeping area has all of the necessary items you may need to sleep, such as pillows, blankets, and a sound machine to muffle distracting noises.
- Reduce Use of Electronics- The blue light from electronics can interrupt the production of sleep hormones, causing difficulty sleeping. Aim to put away electronic devices at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Avoid Caffeine – Caffeine is typically used to provide a boost of energy. Consuming caffeine before bed can make it hard to fall asleep and make sleep not as restful. The general recommendation for cutting off caffeine products is a minimum of eight hours before going to bed.

If there is a continuous pattern of inadequate sleep or concerns, visit and speak with your healthcare team.

Source: Texas A&M AgriLife Intranet - Home



The mysteries of how memory works are explained in a new book that suggests anyone can boost their powers of recall – and that losing your keys is normal. Dr Megan Sumeracki and Dr Althea Need Kaminske say storing and retrieving information is far more complex than people think. Extremes of memory such as photographic or savant are also very rare despite their regular portrayal in films. Their new book *The Psychology of Memory* outlines simple recollection-boosting techniques to improve learning – or to help remember names and numbers.

Forgetting is normal

The authors highlight how a degree of forgetting is natural to allow the brain to remember more general information. Memory does not work like a recording device, they say, but ‘more like a Wiki page’ because details can be edited.

The authors, who are both US-based psychologists, call for greater understanding of how memory really works, as it can have real life impact. For example, they suggest potential jurors should be taught how memory works, as victims of crime may not be believed in court because their memories are patchy even though this is perfectly normal.

Dr Kaminske writes: “Because we are most aware of our memory when we have trouble remembering something, our intuitions about how memory works might be a little biased.

“For example, I (Althea) spend an embarrassing amount of time looking for my phone, water bottle, and keys. You may be unsurprised to learn that our memory systems are not necessarily designed to remember where we put our phones. Or keys. Or water bottles.

“Though we would hazard a guess that if we were in a survival scenario where dehydration was a concern, we would be much more aware of water sources. “People are better at remembering information when they process it in a fitness-relevant scenario, such as being stranded in the grasslands of a foreign land.”

How to improve memory

The Psychology of Memory uses research based on cognitive psychology to increase understanding of all types of memory and their impact. It shows how memory has a huge impact on our lives and can be impaired by alcohol, sleep-deprivation and caffeine.

The book explains the science behind different memory systems and types, such as short and long-term memory, and what they are used for.

The authors debunk myths such as that memory is merely a collection of past events. Instead, they show how it is vital for remembering to perform a task in the future. Strategies can strengthen this type of memory which is known as ‘event-based’ recall. Dr Sumeracki and Dr Kaminske suggest leaving a purse in the back seat of the car as a cue to remember to remove your child from their car seat before heading into work.

Other memory-boosting techniques can improve long-term knowledge and lead to more efficient learning, according to the authors.

One technique described in the book is 'retrieval practice', the strategy of 'pulling' facts from memory. An example is learning a new colleague's name by deliberately addressing them by it every time you see them.

Chess players remember the location of pieces on the board using schema, a way of organizing new information in the brain. The benefit of schema is it also reduces demands on working memory, and while the authors are not suggesting that it is easy to become a chess champion, anyone can use schema to store and recall complex information.

"Visual and auditory techniques can also help train the memory of normal individuals. The ability to recall the order of cards in a pack seems impressive but can be achieved by creating mental associations for each card," they explain.

"Anyone who has studied knows that regular practice is essential. But to become an expert in a field of learning, people need to employ deliberate practice. The difference is that deliberate practice involves purposeful and deliberate attention whereas regular practice just involves repetition."

Source: *Morning Ag Clips | America's #1 Ag News Source*

6 TIPS TO A BETTER MEMORY

1. LEARN SOMETHING

Stimulating the brain helps it develop a resilience that allow us to fight off diseases like Alzheimer's.



2. EAT RIGHT

A diet high in leafy green vegetables, fish, nuts and healthy oils like coconut and olive may ward off Alzheimer's.

6. MEDITATE

Practising meditation for ten minutes a day improves concentration and the ability to retain information.



3. SLEEP

At least six hours of sleep at night helps improve your memory function and lowers your risk of stroke.



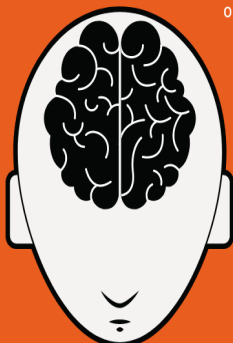
5. WALK WITH A FRIEND

A workout, stress-relieving social interaction and good conversation are a triple threat in aiding a better memory.



4. CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Try certain brain exercises such as puzzles to help boost your memory, concentration, and focus.



Kitchen Timesavers

Try these kitchen timesavers to cut back on time and make less work for you:

Organize your kitchen—Keep items you use most often, like cooking oils/sprays, spatulas, cutting boards and spices within easy reach. This will save you from having to search for them later.

Clear the clutter—Before you start cooking, clear off your counters. This allows more room for prep space.

Chop extra—When chopping up veggies for a meal, chop more than you need. Take the extra and freeze them for later. Then next time you need them, you can skip a step.

Have everything in place—Grab all ingredients needed for your meal at the same time. It will be easier to spot missing items and avoid skipping steps.

Double your recipe—For your next dish, try doubling the recipe and freezing the extra. You'll save time and make cooking next week's dinner a snap.

Clean as you go—Fill up the sink with soapy water and wash the dishes as you cook. It will make clean up go much smoother.

Save some for later—Freeze leftover soups, sauces, or gravies in small reusable containers.

Source: <https://www.myplate.gov>



Kim Miles—CEA-FCH
Taylor County
1982 Lytle Way
Abilene, TX. 79602
325-672-6048
kamiles@ag.tamu.edu
taylor.agrilife.org



Pasta Vegetable Salad

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked pasta (any shape)
- 1 cup diced cucumber
- 1 large tomato, chopped
- 1/2 green pepper, medium (diced)
- 1/4 onion, medium (diced)
- 1/2 cup frozen peas (thawed)
- 1/4 cup Italian salad dressing

Directions:

Wash your hands with soap and water. Mix all ingredients in a medium-sized bowl. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour. Mix again before serving. Refrigerate leftovers.

Source: Eating Smart Being Active Recipes—Colorado State University and University of California at Davis

April 21-27, 2024 was National Volunteer Week. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension in Taylor County would not function without all of our wonderful volunteers. The Taylor County Extension office has over 15 volunteer groups that give many hours of their valuable time and service to implement and facilitate Extension programs. THANK YOU for all that you do. We appreciate you.



Family and Community Health “Connections”

is provided by the following
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Stacy Drury, D7 Regional Program Leader

Lorena Iverson, BLT Regional Project
Specialist