

Family & Community Health “Connections” in Taylor County

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April is National Stress Awareness Month

Everyone experiences stress – the condition caused by a reaction to physical, chemical, emotional or environmental factors. However, they feel it in different amounts and react to it in different ways. Constant, or chronic, stress can cause many health issues. It can cause the body to remain in high gear for extended periods of time, which causes breathing and heart rate to speed up and blood pressure to rise.

Stress may affect many of the risk factors and behaviors for heart disease, such as high blood pressure, smoking, physical inactivity and poor eating habits.

Stress may contribute to poor health behaviors

Stress may contribute to poor health behaviors linked to increased risk for heart disease and stroke, such as:

- Smoking
- Overeating
- Not getting enough physical activity
- Eating an unhealthy diet
- Being overweight
- Not taking medications as prescribed

Your body’s response to stress can include things such as:

- A headache
- Body pains
- Stomach pains
- Rashes
- Stress can also:
 - Reduce your energy
 - Wreak havoc on your sleep
 - Make you feel cranky, forgetful or out of control

How can I manage stress?

A stressful situation sets off a chain of events. Your body releases adrenaline, a hormone that briefly causes your breathing and heart rate to speed up and your blood pressure to rise. These reactions prepare you to deal with the situation, giving you what is known as “fight or flight” response.

- Exercise regularly.
- Make time for friends and family.
- Get enough sleep each night.
- Practice relaxation tips, like meditation.
- Find a stimulating hobby that you enjoy that keeps you engaged.

Figuring out how stress affects your body is an important step in dealing with it. Identify sources of stress in your life and look for ways to reduce and manage them. A health care professional can help you find ways to manage your stress.

<https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/stress-and-heart-health>

Benefits of Gardening on Mental Health

Growing your own food in a garden isn't a new idea. It was a critical way for ancient people to have access to reliable, nutritious foods. The necessity of vegetable gardens has varied through time. Gardening has gained popularity recently, even with easy and inexpensive access to food at grocery stores. Hard work pays off with fruiting or flowering of a plant, bigger/more growth of a plant, and/or having your overall goal be achieved, thus increasing self-esteem.

A few benefits from digging in the dirt:

- **Increased exercise**
 - Those who garden tend to have increased strength and stamina compared to those who do not garden regularly. Exercising from gardening activities releases dopamine, the feel-good hormone, and this in turn leads to better memory, less anxiety, and feeling happier. Gardening also can improve your balance, strength and flexibility. You perform squats and lunges while weeding. Carrying bags of mulch and other supplies works large muscle groups. Digging, raking and using a push mower can be physically intense activities.
- **Improved diet**
 - Those who have vegetable patches and grow their own food are typically eating fruit/vegetables at their freshest points when the produce is rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Many who garden organically consume less preservatives and pesticides than those who eat nonorganic fruits/vegetables.
- **Time in nature**
 - Getting outdoors is good for your physical and mental health. People tend to breathe deeper when outside. This helps to clear out the lungs, improves digestion, improves immune response and increases oxygen levels in the blood. Spending time outdoors has been shown to reduce heart rate and muscle tension. Sunlight lowers blood pressure and increases vitamin D levels.
- **Reduced stress levels**
 - It's been shown to lighten mood and lower levels of stress and anxiety. It's very gratifying to plant, tend, harvest and share your own food. Routines provide structure to our day and are linked to improved mental health. Gardening routines, like watering and weeding, can create a soothing rhythm to ease stress.
- **Social connections**
 - The gardening community is rich with people willing to share their expertise, time and occasionally plants with new gardeners. Community gardens, garden clubs, etc. can be an excellent way to meet new people and expand your gardening skills. Those who belong to these groups tend to feel connectedness with group members and can learn new things at the same time. Social connections are important because they help lower stress, improve resilience and provide support during difficult times in life. A strong sense of belonging lowers your risk of depression, anxiety and suicide.

<https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/dig-into-the-benefits-of-gardening>

<https://extension.psu.edu/programs/master-gardener/counties/adams/news/the-many-mental-health-benefits-of-gardening>

Volunteering and its Surprising Benefits



Volunteering offers vital help to people in need, worthwhile causes, and the community, but the benefits can be even greater for you, the volunteer. The right match can help you find friends, connect with the community, learn new skills, and even advance your career. Giving to others can also help protect your mental and physical health. It can reduce stress, combat depression, keep you mentally stimulated, and provide a sense of purpose. While it's true that the more you volunteer, the more benefits you'll experience, volunteering doesn't have to involve a long-term commitment or take a huge amount of time out of your busy day. Giving in even simple ways can help those in need and improve your health and happiness.

Benefits of volunteering: 4 ways to feel healthier and happier

1. Volunteering connects you to others.
 - Make new friends & contacts.
 - Increase your social & relationship skills.
 - Volunteer as a family.
2. Volunteering is good for your mind and body.
 - Helps counteract the effects of stress, anger, and anxiety.
 - Volunteering combats depression.
 - Volunteering makes you happy.
 - Volunteering increases self-confidence.
 - Volunteering provides a sense of purpose.
 - Volunteering helps you stay physically healthy.
3. Volunteering can advance your career.
 - Volunteering can teach valuable job skills.
 - Volunteering helps with career experience.
 - Passion and positivity are the two main requirements.
4. Volunteering brings fun and fulfillment to your life.
 - Doing volunteer work you find meaningful and interesting can be a relaxing, energizing escape from your day-to-day routine of work, school, or family commitments.
 - Volunteering also provides you with renewed creativity, motivation, and vision that can carry over into your personal and professional life.



Zesty Veggie Flatbread

Ingredients:

- 2 servings Homemade Pesto
- 1/4 cup roasted red peppers
- 1/2 cup cherry tomatoes halved
- 1/4 cup red onion chopped
- 1/2 cup Asparagus spears sliced on bias (about 4 spears)
- 1/2 cup carrots sliced in rounds
- 1/4 cup mozzarella cheese shredded, low sodium
- 1 homemade or store bought flatbread
- 2 Tablespoons fresh basil for garnish



Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees and rinse all fresh vegetables under cool running water before preparing.
2. Prepare pesto according to recipe directions <https://dinnertonight.tamu.edu/recipe/pesto/>.
3. Prepare all toppings - roasted red peppers, cherry tomatoes, red onion, asparagus, carrots, mozzarella cheese and garnish
4. Lay flatbread on non stick baking sheet. Spread made pesto on flatbread leaving about 1/2 inch along the edge.
5. Layer the vegetable toppings on top of pesto on flatbread. Sprinkle half of mozzarella and save the rest for topping after baking.
6. Bake in the oven for 20 minutes until edges are brown and crispy and vegetables are softened but still have a little firmness to them.
7. Remove flatbread from the oven and sprinkle the remaining mozzarella cheese and basil leaves for garnish. Enjoy!

Nutrition Facts

2 servings per container	
Serving size	1/2 flatbread (212g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	170
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 9g	12%
Saturated Fat 2.5g	13%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 10mg	3%
Sodium 360mg	16%
Total Carbohydrate 17g	6%
Dietary Fiber 3g	11%
Total Sugars 7g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
Protein 8g	
Vitamin D 0mg	0%
Calcium 199mg	15%
Iron 2mg	10%
Potassium 316mg	6%

*The % Daily Value tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Zesty Veggie Flatbread | Dinner Tonight

Kim Miles, CEA-FCH
Taylor County
1982 Lytle Way
Abilene, TX 79602
325-672-6048
kamiles@ag.tamu.edu
facebook.com/
<https://www.facebook.com/TaylorCountyExtensionService>



Family & Community Health "Connections" is provided by the following Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Family & Community Health Agents:

- Courtney Parrott, Brown County
- Chanie Schaffner, Coleman County
- Milissa Wright, Concho Valley
- Kelli Maberry, Jones County
- Karen DeZarn, Lampasas County
- Whitney Whitworth, Llano County
- Jessica Holbrook, Mason County
- Carrie Ross, McCulloch County
- Staci Winders, Nolan County
- Kandice Everitt, Runnels County

- Kim Miles, Taylor County
- Courtney Redman, Tom Green County
- Stacy Drury, D7 Regional Program Leader
- Lorena Iverson, Regional Program Specialist

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

Food Managers 2-Day Certification Training

ServSafe Exam Offered

Date

May 19-20, 2025

Time

8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Location

Taylor County Extension Office
1982 Lytle Way
Abilene, TX. 79602

County

Taylor

Cost

\$125.00

How can this course help you?

- Understand the major causes of foodborne illness and how to prevent them
- Increase the food safety knowledge of your employees
- Improve relationships with health officials
- Upon passing the certification exam, you will fulfill state requirements for *Certified Food Manager* status.
- Topics covered include:
 - Foodborne illnesses and how they are caused
 - Food safety hazards
 - Sanitation regulations
 - HACCP
 - AND MORE!

Registration Information

- Included with your registration:**
- 2-Day Course
 - ANSI-CFP Accredited Certified Professional Food Manager exam (CFM)- ServSafe
 - "Food Safety: It's Our Business" course book in English or Spanish

You must bring an acceptable photo ID to be able to take the exam.

For more information and class details, please contact:
Kim Miles

325-672-6048 * kamiles@ag.tamu.edu

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