

Living Well

FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES NEWSLETTER FOR NORTHEAST COLORADO



April-June, 2026

April is Stress Awareness Month: Simple Strategies for a Healthier You

April is recognized as Stress Awareness Month, a reminder to pause, assess, and manage the stressors that impact our daily lives. While some stress is a normal part of life, chronic stress can affect both physical and mental health.

Stress often builds gradually, especially during busy seasons filled with work demands, family responsibilities, and schedule changes. Recognizing early warning signs such as irritability, difficulty concentrating, or changes in appetite can help you take action before stress becomes overwhelming.

- One of the most effective ways to manage stress is through regular physical activity. Even a 10–15 minute walk can boost mood, improve focus, and reduce tension. Spending time outdoors adds an extra benefit, as fresh air and natural light have been shown to support mental well-being.
- Healthy eating habits also play a role in stress management. Skipping meals or relying on highly processed foods can lead to energy crashes and increased irritability. Aim to include balanced meals with whole grains, lean proteins, fruits, and vegetables to help maintain steady energy levels.
- Another key strategy is building small moments of relaxation into your routine. Deep breathing, stretching, or simply taking a few minutes to step away from screens can help reset your mind.
- Social connection is equally important. Talking with a friend, family member, or community group can provide support and perspective during stressful times. You don't have to manage stress alone.

This April, take time to check in with yourself. Start small by choosing one or two stress management strategies that fit your lifestyle. Over time, these small changes can lead to improved resilience, better health, and a greater sense of balance in your everyday life.

Where trade names are used, no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by Colorado State University Extension is implied.

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Help Kids Build Smart Money Habits

Learning how to manage money is an important life skill, and the habits that shape financial decisions begin forming earlier than most people realize.

Research suggests money habits and emotional responses to spending and saving begin forming as early as age five.



While schools play an important role in financial education, families are often children's first and most influential money teachers. Kids learn by observing the financial behaviors of the adults around them. Everyday experiences, from grocery shopping to planning family activities, can become valuable teaching moments.

Yet despite these early opportunities, many young adults still report feeling unprepared to manage their finances. According to the Pew Research Center, only 41% of adults ages 18 – 29 feel confident handling their money.

Families don't have to do this alone. Extension programs help bring these lessons to life through hands-on learning experiences for youth. Programs like Captain Cash and Piggy Bank Primer introduce young people to the basics of earning, saving, sharing, and spending money wisely. These interactive lessons help youth practice real-world decision-making and build healthy money habits that can last a lifetime.

Try This at Home: Simple Money Activities for Families

Start a savings jar: Help your child set a goal for something they want. Using a clear jar allows them to see their savings grow over time and builds excitement as they work toward their goal.

Talk about spending choices: When shopping, explain how you decide what fits within your budget. This helps children understand how families make financial decisions.

Set a family goal: Work together to save for a shared experience such as a movie night, a special meal, or a family outing. This teaches teamwork, planning, and the value of saving.

Give an allowance with purpose: Divide their allowance into three jars – one for spending, one for saving, and one for giving. This introduces the concept of budgeting in a tangible, age-appropriate way.

Teaching kids about money goes beyond managing finances; it helps them build confidence, responsibility, and decision-making skills that will serve them throughout their lives. By starting these conversations early, families can help children grow into confident, capable adults who know how to make smart financial decisions.

Contact your local Extension office to learn about youth financial education resources.

Adapted from: <https://www.phoenix.edu/blog/what-to-know-about-financial-literacy-for-kids.html> and <https://extension.psu.edu/empowering-youth-by-building-early-financial-literacy-skills>

Staying Grounded in Springtime



As spring arrives, many families begin to feel the shift that comes with the end of the school year. Calendars fill quickly with field trips, concerts, sports tournaments, graduations, and celebrations. While these events create exciting memories for children, they can also make family schedules feel overwhelming.

During these busy weeks, one of the most helpful things parents can do is maintain as much routine and consistency as possible. Children thrive on predictability. Regular routines help them feel secure, even when their days are full of new or changing activities. When schedules become unpredictable, children may feel tired, overstimulated, or frustrated. Maintaining simple daily routines—like regular mealtimes, homework time, and consistent bedtimes—helps provide a sense of stability. Even small routines act as anchors in a busy week. Consistency also helps children manage transitions. Knowing what to expect each day can reduce stress and make it easier for them to adjust when special events or schedule changes occur.

Here are a few simple ways families can stay organized and maintain balance during the end-of-school-year rush:

- Keep bedtime routines consistent. With so many activities happening, it can be tempting to stay up later, but children still need adequate sleep to stay focused and regulated.
- Use a family calendar. Posting a visible calendar helps children understand what is coming up and prepares them for changes in routine.
- Prioritize downtime. Not every afternoon needs to be filled. Quiet play, reading, or relaxing at home helps children recharge.
- Prepare for transitions. Talking about upcoming events ahead of time helps children know what to expect.
- Stick to familiar habits when possible. Simple routines like family dinners, bedtime stories, or evening walks help maintain connection and stability.

The end of the school year is a special time filled with accomplishments and celebrations. While schedules may feel busy, the goal is not necessarily to attend every event available but rather choose the most important events for your family. Sometimes it is easy to fill our schedule with not necessarily the most meaningful activities. By maintaining routines and leaving space for rest, families can enjoy this exciting time of year while helping children finish the school year feeling confident and supported.

Spring Cleaning Your Diet: Simple Changes for Healthier Eating

Spring is a time when many people think about cleaning and refreshing their homes. It can also be a great opportunity to “spring clean” your eating habits. Small changes to your pantry, refrigerator, and daily routines can make healthy eating easier and more enjoyable. Instead of trying to completely overhaul your diet, focusing on a few simple improvements can lead to lasting benefits for your health.



Why “Spring Clean” your Diet?

Over time, kitchens can accumulate foods that are highly processed, high in sugar, or past their prime. Refreshing your food stock can help you and your family make healthier choices. Research shows people are more likely to eat nutritious foods when those foods are easy to see, reach, and prepare. A seasonal reset can help you:

- Reduce sugar, sodium, and saturated fat
- Add more nutrient-dense foods like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains
- Make meal planning easier
- Reduce food waste

Spring cleaning your diet does not mean eliminating all your favorite foods. Instead, it is about creating balance and making healthier choices more convenient.

Step 1: Check your pantry.

Start by taking a look at what you already have on hand. A pantry clean-out can help you identify foods that are expired, rarely used, or less nutritious. As you are sorting out foods, check the best by or expiration dates, move older items to the front so they get used first, donate any unopened, non-perishable foods you will not use.

When you begin the restocking process, consider adding foods that support balanced meals such as:

- canned beans (low sodium if possible)
- brown rice or whole grain pasta
- oats
- canned tuna or salmon
- low-sodium soups
- nuts and seeds
- herbs and spices for flavor instead of extra salt

Step 2: Refresh your Refrigerator

Your refrigerator can also benefit from a seasonal refresh. Start by removing expired items and wiping down the shelves. Then organize foods so healthier choices are easier to grab. Store washed fruits and vegetables at eye level, keep healthy ready to eat snacks such as cut vegetables, yogurt, or fruit, and place leftovers in clear containers so they are not forgotten. Keeping fresh foods visible and convenient can encourage healthier snacking and reduce food waste.

Step 3: Add more Fruits and Vegetables

One of the easiest ways to improve your diet is by increasing fruit and vegetable intake. Fruits and vegetables provide important nutrients such as fiber, vitamins, and antioxidants that support overall health.

Spring is a great time to explore seasonal produce, whether that is at a local farmers' market or at the grocery store. If you are looking for some simple ways to add more produce to your diet, consider adding fruit to breakfast cereal, yogurt, or oatmeal, include a side salad with lunch or dinner, snack on sliced vegetables with hummus, add extra vegetables to soups, pasta, or stir-fries.

Step 4: Make Smart Swaps

Healthy eating does not always require dramatic changes. Sometimes small substitutions can make a big difference. Consider making these simple swaps which can reduce added sugar, sodium, and unhealthy fats while keeping meals satisfying:

Instead of:	Try:
Sugary drinks	Water or sparkling water with fruit
White bread	Whole grain bread
Chips	Air-popped popcorn
Sugary desserts	Fruit with yogurt
Creamy sauces	Olive oil, herbs, and spices

Step 5: Plan Ahead for Success

Meal planning is another helpful strategy when refreshing your diet. Planning meals in advance can save time, reduce stress, and prevent last-minute fast-food choices.

Meal planning tips:

- Plan a few meals for the week using the MyPlate concept (<https://www.myplate.gov/>)
- Prepare ingredients ahead of time when possible
- Cook extra portions and use leftovers for meals

Even just planning two or three meals each week can make eating healthier easier.

Spring cleaning your diet does not require perfection. Small steps like adding more vegetables, organizing your kitchen, or planning a few meals each week can support healthier habits over time! Start by refreshing your food environment and making nutritious choices more convenient; you can set yourself up for success.

Sources:

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9182982/>

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

Gardening with Kids

It's gardening time, and what better way to share your love of gardening than with a child, whether that's your own, a friend's, a grandchild, or a neighbor. When kids help grow fruits and vegetables, they are more likely to eat them and try different kinds. In addition to eating healthy foods, gardening benefits children in many other ways. It engages their curiosity, allows them to see how food grows and where it comes from; teaches patience; helps with cognitive development related to remembering, analyzing and asking questions; and predicting and exploring outcomes. Gardening is also a great way to boost self-confidence through growing and caring for food, along with a reason to get outside for some fresh air and physical activity and spend quality time together.



Garden Options

Gardening can be done in the traditional in-ground method where plants are grown directly in soil outdoors or other types of gardens that may be a better fit for your climate, space, and expertise. Raised beds are relatively small, elevated boxes filled with soil. They are easy to locate wherever you choose, have fewer weed and drainage issues, and tend to allow a longer growing season because the soil heats up faster. Container gardening is another option where plants are grown in containers such as pots, planters, baskets, boxes, or barrels rather than in the ground. They can be grown in limited spaces and various locations (i.e. patios, balconies, windowsills).

Following are some tips from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics on gardening with kids.

Make Kids Part of the Planting and Growing Process

Children's involvement and interest in gardening may look different depending on their age. For example, preschoolers might be more fascinated with digging in the dirt, planting seeds and running the garden hose than older children who may be more interested in how a single seed turns into an edible plant. Older kids can read seed packets and start to understand growing regions, and every age loves a fun, reliable plant such as purple carrots and striped beets. Look through garden catalogs together or search the internet and ask children which fruits and vegetables they would like to grow. You can assign each child a task, such as watering, weeding, and harvesting, that allows them to be involved in the full process and gets them excited to taste the end product.

Encourage Taste Testing

Gardening exposes kids to a variety of fruits and vegetables, so encourage them to taste test straight from the ground or plant (after washing) and at the dinner table. Show kids a tomato can taste delicious from the vine or in dishes like fresh salsa or marinara sauce, and carrots can provide a crunchy snack as soon as they are picked or be baked with herbs for a colorful and savory side dish.

Grow Herbs

Herbs are among the easiest plants to grow and a good way to develop kids' interest in gardening. Smelling, tasting and cooking with herbs can be a fun way to learn more about plants and experiment with flavors. A few ideas to start with include mint (peppermint, spearmint, pineapple mint, chocolate mint, apple mint, orange mint), thyme (lemon, German winter, and orange), basil (classic, deep purple, and spicy Thai) and chives.



Start Small with Quick-Growing Plants

Kids enjoy seeing the result of their effort so consider including plants that grow quickly, such as green beans, and produce heavily, such as grape tomatoes. Sunflowers are also a quick growing, fun addition that can be dried for seeds. You can also create a theme garden, such as a dinner salad garden – include salad greens, carrots, tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers.

Dig What Grows Below Ground

Harvesting roots and tubers can be a fun treasure hunt. Carrots, beets and potatoes are easy to grow, come in a variety of colors, and are some of kids' favorites.

Discover All Shapes and Sizes

Cherry tomato plants grow to perfect height and the tomatoes produced are an ideal fit for little hands to pick. Kids may find it exciting to watch melons, butternut squash and pumpkins grow and expand during the season. They could even track the growth by taking weekly measurements and graphing it on a chart. Gardening with kids is a wonderful opportunity to not only nurture plants, but also curiosity, responsibility, and an appreciation for the many physical, emotional and educational benefits growing food together can bring.

Keep It Safe and Fun

Safety is an important part of gardening with kids. Be sure children use age-appropriate tools and understand basic garden safety, such as handling tools carefully and washing hands after working in the soil. Applying sunscreen, wearing hats, and staying hydrated are also important when spending time outdoors. Just as important as safety is keeping the experience enjoyable—allow kids to explore, get a little messy, and learn through trial and error. A positive, low-pressure environment helps children stay engaged and builds a lifelong interest in gardening and healthy eating.

Source: Eatright.org, Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics

Transforming Wellness Across Two Counties:

This pilot 8-week Hispanic wellness program brought together participants from Phillips and Logan Counties for a journey focused on health, connection, and lifestyle changes. Meeting every Tuesday evening, participants explored topics such as body composition, heart health, movement, meal planning, and dementia care through hands-on lessons and interactive activities. The program also included a viewing of the documentary *Legacy*, which highlights mental health challenges faced by farmers and ranchers. Through shared meals and meaningful discussions, participants not only built knowledge, but also formed connections and gained confidence to continue healthy habits beyond the program.



Upcoming Events!

- **ServSafe Handler Training (Spanish)**–
 - Monday, April 13th from 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., Morgan County Fairgrounds in Brush. For more information or to register, contact Joy Akey at (970) 332-4151 or joy.akey@colostate.edu
- **ServSafe Manager Training (Bilingual)** –
 - Tuesday, April 21st from 8:00 a.m. – 5:30 p.m., Gary DeSoto Building in Sterling. For more information or to register, contact Joy Akey at (970) 332-4151 or joy.akey@colostate.edu
- **ServSafe Manager Training (Bilingual)** –
 - Tuesday, June 23rd from 8:00 a.m. – 5:30 p.m., Burlington Community Center in Burlington. For more information or to register, contact Joy Akey at (970) 332-4151 or joy.akey@colostate.edu

Be sure to check our Facebook page listed below to stay up to date on all our upcoming events.



CSU Extension – NE Colorado FCS: <https://www.facebook.com/CSUExtensionNortheastFCS>

CSU Extension – Phillips County: <https://www.facebook.com/PhillipsCountyExtension/>

CSU Extension – Logan County: https://www.facebook.com/csuextensionlogancounty/?_tn=%2Cd%2CP-R&eid=ARCS5-NbtiQryVNn5X513c5--hwVu-1ZfnhynwZsPotP7AZIVStJaoCEoaVYzZjBFhCH0tHJLHaJxQuQ

CSU Extension – Morgan County: <https://www.facebook.com/extensionmorgancounty/>