

Living Well

FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES NEWSLETTER FOR NORTHEAST COLORADO



July-September, 2026

The Importance of Staying Hydrated

As temperatures rise during the summer months, staying hydrated is one of the simplest ways to protect your health. Water helps regulate body temperature, transports nutrients, lubricates joints, and supports healthy digestion. Even mild dehydration can affect how you feel and function throughout the day.

When the weather is hot or you are physically active, your body loses water through sweat. If those fluids are not replaced, dehydration can occur. Common signs include thirst, dry mouth, headache, fatigue, dizziness, and dark-colored urine. Severe dehydration can lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke, which requires immediate medical attention.

Older adults, young children, and individuals who work or exercise outdoors are at greater risk. As we age, our sense of thirst naturally decreases, making it easier to become dehydrated without realizing it.

The best way to stay hydrated is to drink water throughout the day instead of waiting until you feel thirsty. Carry a reusable water bottle, drink water with meals, and take regular water breaks during outdoor activities. When spending extended time outside, increase your fluid intake and seek shade whenever possible.

Many fruits and vegetables also help meet your fluid needs. Watermelon, strawberries, cucumbers, tomatoes, oranges, lettuce, and celery are all refreshing summer choices.

For most people, water is the best choice for staying hydrated. This summer, make hydration part of your daily routine. A few simple habits can help prevent heat-related illness and keep you healthy while enjoying everything the season has to offer.

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Crafting and Brain Health

Many families are familiar with Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of dementia and the profound impact they can have on individuals and their loved ones. These conditions progress differently for each person—sometimes gradually, other times more rapidly. Early symptoms may include confusion, forgetfulness, and changes in mood, which can also occur in everyday life, making diagnosis challenging.



Although the exact cause is not fully understood, dementia affects cognitive function, including memory and language. Individuals may experience increasing confusion, personality changes, and difficulty communicating. These challenges can be both frustrating and debilitating for those living with dementia, and the effects often extend beyond the individual. Over time, family members and friends frequently take on caregiving roles, assuming new responsibilities or seeking additional support to help manage daily activities.

While many aspects of Alzheimer’s disease and dementia remain unknown, emerging research suggests that engaging in creative activities can improve quality of life for those affected. During what can often be a stressful and frustrating time, crafting offers meaningful benefits—helping to reduce stress and anxiety, provide sensory stimulation, support fine motor skills, and promote cognitive engagement.

Creative activities can be easily adapted to match an individual’s abilities and interests. Options such as crocheting, painting, or simple hands-on projects can provide both enjoyment and a sense of purpose. Individuals living with dementia may experience elevated stress levels, sometimes feeling aware of memory lapses or confusion about their surroundings, which can lead to agitation or frustration. Familiar, enjoyable activities—like crocheting—can offer a calming effect. Repetitive, simple patterns are especially beneficial, and there is no need to focus on completing a finished product. The act of creating itself supports relaxation while helping maintain coordination and fine motor skills, which can naturally decline with age.

Keeping the brain active is an important part of overall health, especially as we age. Just like physical exercise strengthens the body, engaging in mentally stimulating activities helps support brain function. Creative activities such as crafting encourage memory recall, promote problem-solving, and provide opportunities for focus and engagement. Even simple, repetitive tasks can help reinforce neural connections and create a sense of accomplishment.

When introducing crafts, it is important to consider safety and choose activities that match an individual’s current abilities. Projects that involve sharp tools, such as embroidery needles, may pose risks for some individuals. Safer alternatives—like puzzles, clay modeling, coloring, painting, or assembling simple crafts—can offer similar cognitive and emotional benefits without added hazards. The goal is to create a positive, enjoyable experience that supports both independence and confidence.

Ultimately, crafting is more than just a pastime—it is a meaningful way to support well-being, connection, and dignity for those living with dementia. By encouraging creative expression and adapting activities to meet individual needs, families and caregivers can help foster moments of calm, joy, and purpose, even in the face of uncertainty.

Source

[I Brain Health: https://col.st/orlcs](https://col.st/orlcs)

The Healing Power of Nature



Summer is the perfect season to enjoy time outdoors – going for walks, gardening, swimming at the pool or lake, camping, picnicking in the park with kids or grandkids, or simply relaxing and listening to the birds sing. Not only are these things fun to do, but spending time outdoors in nature plays a positive role in our mental and physical health.

Exposure to nature, also referred to as green space, is linked to improvements in sleep, blood pressure, mood, and brain function as well as reduced risk for chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer, and lower total mortality in general. One reason for the connection between nature and good health has to do with higher levels of physical activity in those with more exposure to green space. However, research also supports the concept that just *being* in nature is good for you. Even viewing nature scenes outside a window or on a screen provides a calming effect and potentially quicker post-operation recovery time, less need for pain medication and fewer complications for hospital patients. Although the exact reasons for the overall benefits aren't known, there are a few theories as to why.

For example:

- Time outdoors helps regulate our circadian rhythms which can affect how well we sleep, our hormone fluctuations, satiety, and alertness. Good sleep is critical for overall well-being, and hormone health keeps our body's vital processes functioning properly.
- Being in nature can help mediate exposure to certain environmental conditions, especially in urban areas, because green space helps regulate heat, mitigate noise exposure and filter air pollution – all offering protective benefits to our overall health.
- The degree of psychological benefit from exposure to nature varies from person to person but the connection and peace they feel may be because for thousands of years early humans lived in natural spaces and the human brain adapted and changed for those environments. Natural spaces may be stress-relieving because the brain evolved in those places.
- Green spaces offer opportunities for social interaction and community engagement, both of which are linked to multiple beneficial mental and physical health outcomes. These interactions can be simple and unplanned, such as running into a friend while taking a walk, or facilitated events such as community gardens or recreational sports leagues.

In order to reap all the benefits, it is crucial to spend your time in nature mindfully. If you are distracted by a podcast or phone call, your time invested may be of limited value. Truly *be* in nature and involve all your senses – find beauty in something around you, touch things with texture, listen to sounds, feel the breeze on your face, smell a flower. Enjoy it fully.

The Power of Family Meals

When people picture a family meal, they often imagine everyone gathered around the dinner table each night. However, with modern families juggling work schedules, harvest seasons, sports commitments, and school activities, shared meals don't always happen at the same time or place every day—and that's okay. Family meals look different for every family, and what matters most is creating opportunities to connect.



While finding time to gather can be challenging, research consistently shows that family meals offer benefits that extend far beyond what's on the plate. Shared meals give family members space to talk about their day, celebrate successes, work through challenges, and simply enjoy each other's company. In a world filled with busy schedules and digital distractions, these moments of connection matter now more than ever. Research has linked regular family meals to stronger family relationships, improved emotional well-being, healthier eating habits, and a greater sense of belonging. Children and teens who regularly eat with their families also tend to consume more fruits and vegetables, perform better academically, and develop stronger social skills.

Research highlighted by the National Family Meals Movement™ suggests that with each additional family meal shared during the week, adolescents are less likely to experience symptoms of depression, engage in risky behaviors, or misuse substances. Shared meals have also been associated with stronger communication, family connectedness, and problem-solving skills. September is recognized as National Family Meals Month™, a nationwide campaign encouraging families to share one additional meal together each week. The goal is simple: more connection, more conversation, more time together. The benefits don't stop in childhood. Adults who regularly share meals with others often report lower stress levels, stronger family relationships, and more meaningful time with loved ones. For many households, mealtime is one of the few opportunities to slow down and focus on face-to-face conversations.

The good news is that meaningful family meals don't have to be complicated. They might be sandwiches packed for the field during harvest, pizza after a volleyball game, or breakfast before heading out the door. What matters most is taking time to pause, share a meal, and connect with one another. Sometimes the biggest challenge isn't preparing the meal, it's making the time. A few simple strategies can help families build more opportunities to eat together, even during busy seasons.

Making Family Meals Work During Busy Seasons

- Keep meals simple.
- Turn off the TV and put the phones away.
- Use breakfast, lunch, or weekend meals when evenings are packed.
- Focus on conversation, not perfection.
- Enjoy simple seasonal moments together: watermelon on the tailgate, sandwiches in the field, ice cream on the porch, or s'mores around a fire.
- Start small! Commit to one additional meal together each week.

Use National Family Meals Month™ this September as a reminder to add one more shared meal to your week. No matter where it happens, those moments spent eating together can strengthen communication, build connections, and create lasting family memories.

Sources:

- [National Family Meals Movement, FMI Foundation: https://col.st/h3p61](https://col.st/h3p61)
- [Utah State University Extension: https://col.st/8rcj0](https://col.st/8rcj0)
- [The Family Dinner Project: https://col.st/pp04p](https://col.st/pp04p)

Picnic Food Safety



Cooking outdoors was once viewed as a summer only activity shared with family and friends. Now, cooking outdoors takes place year-round. However, as the occurrence of outdoor picnics are elevated in summer months, so are the outdoor temperatures that come along with them so it is important to follow food safety guidelines to prevent harmful bacteria from causing foodborne illness. There are four helpful practices to follow to keep picnics and grilling safe: master a cooler, keep it clean, prevent cross contamination, and check the temps.

Coolers are Key: Pack coolers heavily with ice or gel packs to maintain temperatures below 40 degrees. Keep them in the shade rather than in direct sunlight. Bacteria multiply rapidly between 40-140 degrees. Never leave perishable food out for more than two hours; if the temperature climbs above 90 degrees, discard the food after just one hour. Become a packing pro and designate a drink cooler, which gets opened more frequently and loses heat faster, as well as a foods cooler. Packing the food in its own cooler not only helps with temperature control, but also cross contamination.

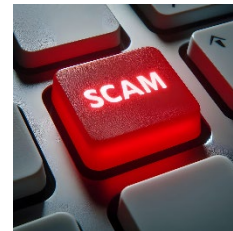
Cleaning and Cross-Contamination: Practicing good hygiene with hand washing before a meal at picnics can sometimes be tricky if running water is not available, so it is a good idea to pack hand sanitizer and jugs of water and soap. Supplement water with antibacterial wipes for cleaning tables and other surfaces, and consider using disposable containers and utensils, especially for raw items. Making sure there are plenty of serving utensils, platters, and plates can help keep areas clean and prevent cross-contamination of foods as they are prepared and cooked. Never place ready-to-eat foods on the same tray as uncooked foods. Prepping ahead of time and packaging in separate containers before a picnic or cookout can also eliminate cross-contamination risks.

Internal Temperatures: Using a food thermometer allows you to accurately measure the internal temperature of meat, ensuring it reaches the proper internal temperature to kill harmful bacteria and pathogens. This ensures the food you have grilled is safe to eat. The USDA recommends the following safe cooking temperatures: 145°F for whole cuts of beef, pork, lamb, and fish; 160°F for ground meats; and 165°F for poultry.

When planning dishes for a picnic, think of nutrient-dense foods. The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025* by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2020) state nutrient-dense foods "provide vitamins, minerals, and other health-promoting components and have no or little added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium." Examples of nutrient-dense foods include vegetables; fruits; whole grains; seafood; eggs; beans, peas, and lentils; unsalted nuts and seeds; fat-free and low-fat dairy products; and lean meats and poultry. Picnic foods that are healthy and easy to transport include whole or sliced fruits; sliced vegetables; different types of vegetable salads; pasta salads made with whole wheat pasta and a low-fat dressing; dishes containing beans, peas, and lentils; unsalted nuts and seeds; fat-free and low-fat cheese and yogurt; and individually wrapped sandwiches made with lean meats and poultry. Pack water or fruit and vegetable-infused water to drink as low-calorie beverage choices.

Avoiding Summer Scams

Summer is a busy season filled with vacations, fairs, outdoor activities, and online shopping. Unfortunately, it is also a popular time for scammers to take advantage of consumers. Learning to recognize common scams can help protect your finances and personal information.



Vacation Rental Scams -- As families search for affordable vacation accommodations, scammers often post fake rental listings online. These listings may feature attractive photos, low prices, and urgent requests for payment. Once payment is sent, the property may not exist, or the renter may discover that someone else has already reserved the property.

Before booking:

- Research the property and compare it with listings on multiple websites and reviews.
- Communicate through reputable booking platforms whenever possible.
- Be cautious if asked to pay by wire transfer, gift card, or payment app.

Fake Online Stores and Sales -- Summer sales can be tempting, but some websites are created solely to collect payment information without delivering products. These sites often advertise very discounted merchandise that seem too good to be true.

To shop safely:

- Verify the website uses "https" and has a secure connection.
- Research unfamiliar retailers before making a purchase.
- Use a credit card when possible, as it may provide better fraud protection.

Phishing Texts and Emails -- Scammers frequently send messages claiming to be from banks, delivery companies, government agencies, or popular retailers. These messages often create a sense of urgency and encourage recipients to click on a link or provide personal information.

Protect yourself by:

- Avoiding links in unexpected emails or text messages.
- Contact organizations directly through their official websites or phone numbers.
- Never share passwords, account numbers, or verification codes through email or text.

Fair and Event Ticket Scams -- Summer festivals, concerts, and fairs can attract ticket scammers. Fraudulent sellers may advertise tickets online that are counterfeit, duplicated, or nonexistent.

To reduce risk:

- Purchase tickets directly from official event organizers or authorized sellers.
- Be cautious of social media sellers requesting immediate payment.
- Save receipts and confirmation emails.

General Tips for Staying Safe -- Scammers rely on emotion and urgency. Whether it is a vacation deal, a limited-time sale, or a warning that an account has been compromised, take time to verify information before acting.

Remember:

- If an offer seems too good, it probably is. Never feel pressured to make an immediate decision.
- Monitor bank and credit card statements regularly.
- Report suspected scams to local authorities or consumer protection agencies.

By staying informed and taking a few simple precautions, you can enjoy the summer season while keeping your money and personal information secure. A little caution today can help prevent costly problems tomorrow.

County Fairs

- Phillips County Fair – July 20th – July 26th: at Phillips County Fairgrounds in Holyoke: Open Class entries Wednesday, July 22nd 1:00-6:00 p.m. Must be pre-entered in ShoWorks. For more information or to [register](https://col.st/dgp5m) visit: <https://col.st/dgp5m>
- Kit Carson County Fair – July 25th – August 1st at County Fairgrounds in Burlington. Quilt entries will be accepted on Saturday, July 25th from 9:00-10:00 a.m. Special Living Arts, Foods, Living Arts, and Fabric & Needlework entries will be accepted Monday, July 27th from 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. Floriculture entries will be accepted on Wednesday, July 29th from 8:00-10:00 a.m. and Garden entries will be accepted on Thursday, July 30th at 10:00 a.m. For more information visit the [Kit Carson County Fair](https://col.st/jpsy5) webpage: <https://col.st/jpsy5>
- Sedgwick County Fair – July 22nd – July 26th at County Fairgrounds in Julesburg: Open Class Entries excluding Floriculture, Garden & Crops Wednesday, July 22nd from 8:00-9:30 a.m.
- Eastern Colorado Roundup (Washington County) – July 20th - July 25th at Washington County Fairgrounds in Akron: Open Class and Horticulture entries Mon. July 20th 1:00-6:00 p.m. Baked foods, garden, and horticulture entries need to be in place by 8:30 a.m. on Tues. July 21st.
- Logan County Fair – July 24th – August 3rd: Ticketed Events begin July 28th. Open Class entries must be pre-entered by July 17th for no fee; late entries are accepted for a fee the day of show. For more info visit the [Logan County Fair](http://www.lcfair.org/) website: <http://www.lcfair.org/>
- Morgan County Fair – July 24th – July 30th at the Morgan County Fairgrounds in Brush: Entries for Open Class Home Economics are accepted Thursday, July 23rd from 7:00-8:00 p.m. and again on Friday, July 24th from 8:00-11:00 a.m. For more information, visit the [Morgan County Fair](https://col.st/map8p) webpage: <https://col.st/map8p>
- Yuma County Fair – July 29th – August 2nd at County Fairgrounds in Yuma: Open Class entries Wednesday, July 29th 4:00-6:00 p.m. and Thursday, July 30th 7:30-9:00 a.m. For more information about the [Yuma County Fair](https://col.st/58kej) visit: <https://col.st/58kej>

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://col.st/3n634>

CSU Extension – Phillips County: <https://col.st/qnoyp>

CSU Extension – Logan County: <https://col.st/a3dqn>

CSU Extension – Morgan County: <https://col.st/uam4q>