

Living Well

FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES NEWSLETTER FOR NORTHEAST COLORADO



October-December, 2026

12 Days of Fitness

A simple, doable way to keep moving through the holidays.

Do them in order, skip around, or repeat your favorites. The goal is simply to keep moving!

Day 1 – Holiday Walk. Take a 10-minute walk. Have more time? Go for 20.

Day 2 – Jingle & Stretch. Spend 5–10 minutes stretching to your favorite holiday music.

Day 3 – Decorate & Move. Put up the decorations (reaching high and low)- keep moving!

Day 4 – Holiday Dance Break. Dance to three favorite holiday songs.

Day 5 – Reindeer Legs. Do 10 chair sit-to-stands or squats. Feeling good? Do another set.

Day 6 – Holiday Buddy Walk. Call a friend or family member and take a walk while you catch up.

Day 7 – Elf on the Shelf. Practice your balance by standing on one foot near a sturdy surface. Hold for 10–20 seconds, switch sides, and repeat.

Day 8 – Stir It Up. Baking today? Add a few calf raises while you're at the counter.

Day 9 – Wrap & Move. Between packages, add a few stretches or floor sit-to-stands.

Day 10 – Santa's Shopping Steps. Heading out for holiday shopping? Park a little farther away and walk extra when you can.

Day 11 – Santa's Workshop Workout. Complete 10 air squats, 10 floor sit-to-stands, 10 calf raises, and a quick stretch. Keep it simple and see if you can do it twice!

Day 12 – Pick Your Favorite. Repeat your favorite activity and choose one to carry into the new year.

Keep It Going

Twelve days can be a great start. To keep it going consider joining our upcoming program, A Healthier Weigh, which is a 12-week program designed to help you build on small, practical changes around nutrition, physical activity, and overall wellness. Watch for more information coming soon!

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

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GOLDEN PLAINS AREA
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Colorado State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Kit Carson, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, and Yuma Counties cooperating.

Extension programs are available to all without discrimination.

Understanding Food Date Labels: Safety or Quality?

You've probably heard the joke that one person throws away food the moment it reaches the date on the package, while the other ignores the date entirely—and somehow, they end up marrying each other. So, who is right?



The truth is, neither extreme is ideal. According to the USDA, approximately 30% of food is wasted at the retail and consumer levels, and confusion about food date labels is a major contributor to that waste.

Many people assume the date printed on a package tells them when the food becomes unsafe to eat. In reality, most date labels are intended to indicate quality, not safety.

The USDA defines common food date labels as follows:

- **Best if Used By/Before:** Indicates when a product will have its best flavor and quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- **Sell-By:** Tells retailers how long to display the product for inventory purposes. It is not a safety date.
- **Use-By:** Recommends the last date for peak quality. Except for infant formula, it is generally not a safety date.
- **Freeze-By:** Suggests when a product should be frozen to maintain its best quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

For most foods, these dates do not mean the product is unsafe to eat once the date has passed. If the food has been stored properly and shows no signs of spoilage, it is often still safe to consume. While the quality, flavor, or texture may gradually decline over time, the food itself may still be perfectly edible.

The one important exception is **infant formula**. Federal regulations require a "Use-By" date on infant formula because its nutritional quality cannot be guaranteed after that date. For most other packaged foods, manufacturers voluntarily provide date labels to help consumers enjoy products at their highest quality.

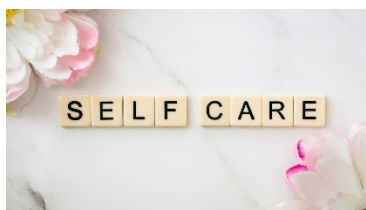
Food safety depends far more on proper handling than on the date printed on the package. How food is stored, transported, prepared, and cooked all affects the growth of harmful bacteria. Bacteria multiply rapidly in the **temperature danger zone** between **40°F and 140°F**. Keeping cold foods cold, hot foods hot, cooking foods to their recommended internal temperatures, and reheating leftovers to **165°F** all help reduce the risk of foodborne illness. Food service establishments are trained to move food through this temperature danger zone as quickly as possible to limit bacterial growth.

Instead of relying solely on the date label, use your senses when evaluating food. If a product has an unusual odor, off flavor, slimy texture, or visible mold, it should be discarded. When in doubt, it's always safest to throw it out.

It's also important to remember that not all spoiled food is the same. Some spoilage is caused by bacteria that simply make food taste, smell, or look unpleasant. However, food can also contain **pathogenic bacteria** that cause foodborne illness without changing the food's appearance, smell, or taste. This is why proper food handling and storage practices are just as important as paying attention to the condition of the food itself. Understanding what food date labels actually mean can help reduce unnecessary food waste, save money, and keep your family safe. By storing food properly and recognizing the difference between quality and safety, you can make more informed decisions about when food is still good to eat.

More information can be found from the [USDA FSIS](https://col.st/4mxzl) website: <https://col.st/4mxzl>

Self-Care This Season: Before, During, and After the Holidays



As the days become shorter and schedules begin to fill up, October is a good time to pause and check in with yourself. Self-care isn't selfish, and it doesn't have to mean spending money or taking an entire day off. Sometimes, self-care is simply giving yourself permission to slow down.

Stress is a normal part of life, but ongoing stress can affect both our physical and emotional well-being. Building small moments of relaxation into our daily routines can help us manage stress more effectively.

Create a Simple Self-Care Routine

Try choosing one small activity each day that helps you feel refreshed:

- Take a walk outside.
- Listen to calming music.
- Read a few pages of a book or write in a journal
- Spend time with someone who makes you feel good.
- Give yourself permission to rest.

You don't have to do everything, and you don't have to earn rest. Rest is taking care of yourself, so ask yourself, "what is one thing I can do that will make me feel a little more refreshed?"

The holiday months bring lots of emotions and responsibilities as work may become busier, family schedules more complicated, or financial pressures may begin to build. It is easy to put yourself last when there is so much to do, but taking care of yourself can help you handle those demands with greater balance. There are healthy approaches to managing stress, including getting enough sleep, staying physically active, taking breaks, connecting with others, practicing relaxation techniques, and making time for activities you enjoy.

Recognize Your Stress Signals

Stress can show up differently for everyone. You may notice you're more tired, impatient, distracted, worried, or having difficulty sleeping. When you notice those signs, don't ignore them. Consider them a reminder to pause and check in with yourself. Give yourself permission to say no as setting healthy boundaries is an important part of self-care. You cannot attend every event, complete every task, or meet everyone's expectations. Give yourself permission to enjoy the season without trying to make everything perfect. All of the holiday obligations of shopping, cooking, traveling, and end-of-year responsibilities can leave you feeling exhausted. Try to focus on what matters.

- Time with people you care about.
- Moments of laughter.
- Rest and renewal.
- Gratitude for the good things in your life.
- Making memories instead of meeting expectations.

You deserve to experience the holidays, not just survive them. Slow down when you can, breathe, rest, laugh, and connect with family and friends. Try to let some of the tasks be imperfect. Taking care of yourself is not another item on your to-do list, it is part of living well.

Financial Reflection: Look Back to Plan Ahead

The holiday season is a time to give, gather, and enjoy traditions with the people we care about. It can also be a time when spending quickly adds up. Gifts, food, travel, entertainment, charitable giving, and those “it’s the holidays” purchases can make it easy to spend more than we planned. Our emotions can play a role, too. We may want to make the season extra special, take advantage of a great sale, or simply decide we’ll worry about it in January—until those January bills arrive.



Taking a little time to reflect on our finances can help us enjoy the holidays without losing sight of what comes next. Financial well-being isn't just about how much money you have. It's also about feeling in control of your day-to-day finances, being prepared for unexpected expenses, and making progress toward the goals that matter most to you and your family. Review last year's October through December spending to see where your money went, recognize what worked well, and identify what you may want to do differently this holiday season.

The goal isn't to take the fun out of the holidays or avoid spending altogether. It's about spending in a way that fits your priorities and your budget. A few simple steps can help.

Making Financial Reflection Work During the Holidays

- **Look back.** Review your spending from last October through December. What surprised you? Did you forget to plan for any expenses?
- **Count the extras.** Remember food, travel, shipping, entertaining, charitable giving, and other seasonal expenses, not just gifts.
- **Set a spending limit.** Decide what you are comfortable spending before the shopping even begins.
- **Pause before you purchase.** Ask yourself whether the purchase fits your plan or whether you are reacting to a sale, stress, or pressure.
- **Plan for next year.** Some expenses come around every year. Making a note of them now can help you prepare for them later.
- **Focus on what matters most.** Choose the traditions, gifts, and experiences that are most meaningful to you and your family.
- **Start small!** Set aside 20 minutes before the new year to review your finances and choose one change to carry out the year ahead.

Holiday Spending Check-In

Before the holiday spending gets underway, how many can you check?

- ☐ I have a general idea of what I can comfortably spend.
- ☐ I have included expenses beyond gifts.
- ☐ I know which holiday traditions and purchases matter most to me.
- ☐ I have a plan for unexpected expenses.
- ☐ I have a way to keep track of my spending.

Mostly checked? You're off to a good start.

A few unchecked? Pick one area to work on before the holiday rush.

The end of the year is a good time to take stock of where you've been and where you want to go. A little reflection now can help make holiday spending more intentional and the transition into the new year a little easier.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau offers a free, [10-question Financial Well-Being Scale](https://col.st/7l8kr) if you'd like to take a closer look at your overall financial well-being.

<https://col.st/7l8kr>

Sources:

- Consumer Financial Protection Bureau: <https://col.st/o8n2y>
- Consumer Financial Protection Bureau: <https://col.st/sr9vq>
- American Psychological Association: <https://col.st/fgedn>
- Frontiers in Behavioral Economics: <https://col.st/04k44>

Maintaining Muscle Mass Across Adulthood: Why It Matters and How to Do It



Muscle mass is a cornerstone of healthy aging. Beyond supporting strength and mobility, skeletal muscle plays an important role in balance, metabolic health, glucose regulation, bone health, and the ability to perform everyday activities independently. Unfortunately, muscle loss is a normal part of aging. Adults typically begin losing muscle mass around age 30 to 40, with estimates suggesting a decline of approximately 3% to 8% per decade that accelerates after age 60 if preventive measures are not taken.

The good news is muscle loss is not inevitable. Research consistently shows regular exercise, adequate nutrition, and selected supplements can slow, halt, or even reverse age-related muscle decline.

Resistance Exercise: The Foundation. Resistance training is the most effective strategy for preserving muscle mass throughout life. Activities such as weightlifting, resistance-band exercises, bodyweight movements, and strength machines stimulate muscle protein synthesis and encourage muscle growth. Comprehensive reviews from the [American College of Sports Medicine](#) found resistance training significantly improves muscle size, strength, power, balance, and physical function in healthy adults.

Most adults should aim to perform resistance exercise at least two days per week, targeting all major muscle groups. The latest evidence suggests consistency is more important than finding the "perfect" program. Any well-structured resistance training routine performed regularly can provide meaningful benefits.

Aerobic exercise also contributes to muscle health by supporting cardiovascular fitness, recovery, and overall activity levels. A combination of resistance and endurance exercise appears to provide the greatest benefits for healthy aging.

Nutrition: Fueling Muscle Maintenance. Adequate dietary protein is essential for maintaining muscle mass. The current Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) is 0.8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight per day, but evidence suggests many active adults and older adults may benefit from higher intakes ranging from 1.0 to 1.6 grams per kilogram per day, particularly when engaging in regular resistance training. Equally important is the distribution of protein throughout the day. Consuming a source of high-quality protein at each meal helps stimulate muscle protein synthesis more effectively than consuming most daily protein at a

single meal. Excellent sources include lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy products, soy foods, beans, lentils, and nuts. Adequate calorie intake also matters. Chronic under-eating, especially during weight-loss attempts, can accelerate muscle loss. When weight reduction is desired, combining sufficient protein intake with resistance exercise helps preserve lean tissue.



Supplements: Adjuncts, Not Replacements. Supplements cannot replace healthy eating and exercise, but some may provide additional support. Creatine monohydrate is among the most researched supplement for muscle health. Studies indicate that creatine supplementation, particularly when combined with resistance training, can increase lean body mass, improve strength, and enhance physical performance in older adults. It may also contribute to reducing fall risk by improving muscle function. Protein supplements, such as whey protein powders, may help individuals meet daily protein goals when food intake is insufficient. However, supplementation appears most effective when paired with exercise rather than used alone. Adults considering supplements should consult a healthcare professional, especially if they have chronic medical conditions or take prescription medications.

Long-Term Benefits of Retaining Muscle Mass. Preserving muscle mass provides benefits that extend far beyond appearance or athletic performance. Muscle also serves as a reservoir of amino acids that can help the body recover from illness, injury, and other physiological stresses. Research further shows that maintaining muscular fitness is linked to healthier aging and lower risk of disability, hospitalization, and premature mortality. Individuals who remain physically active and preserve muscle mass are more likely to maintain mobility and independence as they age.

Sources:

Resistance Training Prescription for Muscle Function, Hypertrophy, and Physical Performance in Healthy Adults: An Overview of Reviews. *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, 2026. [[pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](#)]
[American College of Sports Medicine](#). ACSM Publishes Updated Resistance Training Guidelines, 2026. [[acsm.org](#)]
National Strength and Conditioning Association. Resistance Training for Older Adults: Position Statement. [[nsca.com](#)]
[Campbell, W. W.](#), et al. Nutritional Interventions: Dietary Protein Needs and Influences on Skeletal Muscle of Older Adults. *Journal of Gerontology: Biological Sciences and Medical Sciences*, 2023. [[pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](#)]
[Morgan, P. T.](#), et al. Dietary Protein Recommendations to Support Healthy Muscle Ageing in the 21st Century and Beyond. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 2025. [[pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](#)]
[Moore, D. R.](#). Keeping Older Muscle “Young” Through Dietary Protein and Physical Activity. *Advances in Nutrition*, 2014. [[ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](#)]
[Candow, D. G.](#), et al. Effectiveness of Creatine Supplementation on Aging Muscle and Bone: Focus on Falls Prevention and Inflammation. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 2019. [[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](#)]
[Liu, S.](#), et al. The Impact of Creatine Supplementation Associated With Resistance Training on Muscular Strength and Lean Tissue Mass in the Aged: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis, 2025. [[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](#)]

Raising Helpful Kids: Teaching Responsibility Through Everyday Tasks



Every parent wants their children to grow into capable, responsible adults, but these skills don't develop overnight. Children learn responsibility through everyday opportunities to contribute, make decisions, and care for themselves and others. One of the simplest ways to build these skills is by giving children regular, age-appropriate responsibilities at home.

Research and child-development experts recognize household chores can do more than keep a home running. Regular responsibilities give children opportunities to develop independence, organization, time-management skills, and confidence. Chores also help children understand that families work as a team and everyone has a role to play.

Start Small: Children can begin helping at a young age. Young children might put away toys, place dirty clothes in a hamper, help feed a pet, or carry unbreakable dishes to the table. As children grow, responsibilities can become more involved, such as doing laundry, preparing simple meals, cleaning their rooms, or helping with yard work. Choose tasks that match your child's age and abilities, and introduce new responsibilities gradually. The goal isn't perfection. It is giving children opportunities to practice skills and experience success.

Teach, Don't Just Tell: Children are more likely to succeed when they understand exactly what is expected. Take time to demonstrate a new task and break larger jobs into manageable steps. For example, instead of simply telling a child to "clean your room," start with specific tasks such as putting toys away, placing dirty clothes in the hamper, and making the bed. Be patient as children learn. Adults can often complete a task faster, but stepping in too quickly can take away an important opportunity for children to practice. Recognize effort and improvement rather than expecting adult-level results.

Make Helping Part of the Routine: Children are more likely to follow through when responsibilities are predictable. A simple chore chart or regular routine can help children know what is expected and provide a visual reminder of their responsibilities. Whenever possible, give children some choice in the tasks they complete. Having a voice in family responsibilities can increase their sense of ownership. Chores can also become opportunities for connection. Folding laundry together, preparing a meal, or working outside as a family allows children to contribute while spending time with the people they love.

Focus on Contribution, Not Perfection: Children don't need to be paid for every household responsibility. Regular chores can help children understand everyone contributes to keeping a family functioning. Allowances can be used separately to teach money-management skills, while routine household tasks remain part of being a contributing family member. Most importantly, let children know their efforts matter. A simple "Thank you for helping" or "That made my job easier" reinforces the idea that their contribution is valuable.

Raising helpful children isn't about having a perfectly clean house. It is about helping children develop the skills, confidence, and sense of responsibility they need to care for themselves, contribute to their families, and become capable adults.

Sources:

American Academy of Pediatrics, *Age-Appropriate Chores for Children*: <https://col.st/ssybK>

Cornell Cooperative Extension: *Children and Chores*: <https://col.st/3b0kj>

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry: *Chores and Children*: <https://col.st/pt6m1>

Seasonal Fall Foods

As the daylight hours shorten and the air becomes crisp, our food focus turns from summer picnics and garden favorites to the heartier fall seasonal dishes of roasted vegetables, savory soups and baked fruits. Seasonal produce (fruits and vegetables purchased and consumed shortly after being harvested) typically provide the best bang for your buck. When a crop is in its peak season, it is readily available and the abundant supply lowers the cost. Overhead costs related to production, complex storage, and long-distance transit are also reduced, so those cost savings are passed along too. In addition, the timing of harvest and minimal travel time helps ensure we consume the produce at its most flavorful stage and when it contains the highest levels of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.



Eating seasonally not only helps with out-of-pocket costs, flavor, and nutritional value, but also encourages a more diverse diet by trying different fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the year. This can lead to a more balanced and varied intake of nutrients.

Even though summer includes a wealth of produce, fall serves up quite an abundance too. Fall season fruits and vegetables include a variety of things we might typically think of such as winter squash, root vegetables like carrots and potatoes, apples, and pears. They all pack a powerful punch of nutrients and health benefits, but this fall try expanding your options. Here are some additional fall foods to try:

Bok Choy – Also known as Chinese cabbage, bok choy is related to kale, collard greens and various cabbages. Stalks should be firm and free of bruises or mushy spots. Leaves should be perky and a vibrant shade of green. Brown or yellow patches indicate signs of age. Use as an addition to stir-fry, curries and soups or cut thinly and add to salads as you would cabbage.

Chard – Also known as Swiss chard or rainbow chard. Even though it isn't related to spinach, it cooks up very similarly and can be used interchangeably in most recipes. Look for crisp, perky, glossy leaves. Remove the stems that go all the way to the top of the leaf. These can be cooked separately from the leafy part and eaten if desired. Chard is great paired with legumes or grains and works well in soups, stews, added to a frittata, or with pasta, and can be steamed, roasted, stuffed, or braised.

Parsnips – Parsnips are root vegetables like carrots but have a slightly stronger flavor more similar to turnips or rutabaga. The whiter the color, the sweeter the flavor. In medieval times before sugar was widely available, parsnips were used as a natural sweetener. This versatile veggie can be grated in place of cabbage for coleslaw, baked, boiled, steamed, roasted, microwaved, or sautéed. To enhance the flavor, try using ginger, mace, nutmeg or cinnamon.

Pomegranates – Pomegranates have a hard red outer skin and are filled with 200-1400 edible seeds called arils. Arils can be added to smoothies, salads and dressings or just eaten as they are. Look for pomegranates that are plump, round and heavy for their size.

For more information on foods in season during fall, click on the following.

[USDA SNAP-Ed Connection: https://col.st/c8l94](https://col.st/c8l94)

[Seasonal Food Guide: https://col.st/g5fzv](https://col.st/g5fzv)

[Colorado Department of Ag Chart: https://col.st/k2zc5](https://col.st/k2zc5)

Highlights

Women's Health Summit

Are you ready for the third annual Women's Health Summit? Colorado State University Extension is set to host the annual event on October 17th! This year's Women's Health Summit will be held at the Phillips County Event Center. Your registration fee covers lunch, childcare, expert speakers, goodie bags, health resources from across Northeastern Colorado, and the opportunity to win door prizes! To register or learn more, visit our [Women's Health Summit](https://col.st/dCtGM) website at: <https://col.st/dCtGM>

2027 A Healthier Weigh

Please join us for this year's A Healthier Weigh challenge. We are developing new lessons to help you stay motivated and learn throughout the 12-week challenge. You can register as a team or four, a team of two, or as an individual. Please reach out to your local FCS Specialist to sign up! They will give you an entry form, consent forms, and information about the weigh-in process. We are looking forward to kicking off another challenge to help you stay active and committed to improving or maintaining or your health in 2027!

Upcoming Events!

- **Women's Health Summit –**
 - Saturday, October 17th from 10:30-4:30. Phillips County Event Center. For more information or to register, contact your local Extension Specialist.
- **ServSafe Manager Training –**
 - Wednesday, October 21st from 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Washington County Fairgrounds in Akron. For more information or to register, contact Joy Akey at (970) 332-4151 or joy.akey@colostate.edu
- **ServSafe Handler Training –**
 - Tuesday, November 10th from 9:00 a.m. to 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
- **A Healthier Weigh –**
 - A Healthier Weigh is a 12-week Health & Fitness Challenge – FCS Specialists be taking registrations for individual and team participation through the end of the year! Registration fee is \$40/person with cash prizes! Be on the lookout for more information soon on your local County Extension websites and Facebook pages. Get your teams ready before the holidays!
 - Weigh ins for Logan, Morgan and Yuma counties will be the week of January 5th
 - Weigh ins for Kit Carson, Phillips and Washington counties will be the week of January 10th
 - Please contact your local Extension Specialist for more details

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>