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Geary County

K-State Research and Extension News

*Knowledge
for Life*

Ask the Agent

Q: If I find a really good buy on cheese, is it okay to buy and freeze it to use later?

A: Cheese keeps best in the refrigerator. If necessary, hard or semi-hard cheese can be frozen if cut in 1-1/2- to 1-pound sizes and packaged in moisture-vapor resistant material. This cheese may become crumbly and mealy when frozen, but will retain its flavor. Cream cheese, cottage cheese and ricotta cheese do not freeze well. Recommended freezer shelf life for cheese is 6 months.



For more information call the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at:

785-238-4161



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Family Traditions Matter

December 2015

One of my favorite memories of teaching Family Living to high school students is when we shared family traditions that were special to each of us. As we would go around the room, each taking a turn, many of the more common traditions were shared such as:

- ◆ Opening one gift on Christmas Eve
- ◆ Making and decorating cookies
- ◆ Waking parents up at the break of day
- ◆ Going to a movie as a family



There is one story that has been a classic to me, though. One student shared that her families Christmas meal tradition was a favorite. Her parents had only two biological children but her parents had "lots of kids" because they cared for foster children. They weren't always sure how many people would be around on Christmas and my student's mom didn't want to get "stuck" in the kitchen cooking all day. To ensure that this didn't happen, they would buy pizza on Christmas Eve and the family would eat pizza on paper plates for their Christmas dinner!

Traditions are stories, beliefs, rituals, and customs that are passed down from one generation to the next. They are important as they help reinforce the sense of belonging a family member has. Traditions often provide security to families in the midst of turmoil. Research supports the view that traditions are important in building strong family relationships between generations. The routines and traditions a family provides contribute to the health and well-being of the family unit and its individuals. Traditions help provide security to young people and an avenue to develop health intergenerational relationships.

To make family traditions a part of your holiday celebrations, be intentional in talking with your family about those traditions you hold dear and why they are important. If you feel your family is lacking in this area, open up a discussion about what the family values and how that can be incorporated into a new tradition. Sometimes our family's traditions have to change as our children launch into their own adult lives. Altering your traditions to meet the growing and changing needs of the family is important.

As this holiday season comes to pass, think about the important family traditions your own family has. If you want to make adjustments, get started now. Ask family members what they would like to do differently. As you make these adjustments, make sure you include all generations in family traditions to help build both relationships and memories. It doesn't matter so much if you still eat breakfast together, or if you have the family meal on Christmas Eve. The important thing is that you get together as a family!

Do-It-Yourself Frozen Dinners

Frozen dinners can be a convenient alternative to a homemade meal on busy days when there isn't much time to cook. But processed frozen dinners from the grocery store can be expensive and are usually high in sodium.

Is there a better alternative? Yes! Prepare homemade frozen dinners. Isn't this difficult? No way! When you are preparing a main dish, it takes only a little more effort and time to make enough for several meals. You can either freeze all of the prepared food in meal sized packages, or you can serve part of the food immediately and freeze the rest for later use. Read on to learn tips for making homemade frozen meals at your home.

- Some food ingredients do not freeze well, including: mayonnaise, yogurt, cream puddings, custard, gelatin, eggs, unbaked biscuits, and fruits and veggies with a high water content, such as cooked potatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, citrus and watermelon.
- Cool foods quickly and freeze them promptly. Place shallow containers of hot food in a larger pan filled with ice or ice water, and stir it often to help cool the food faster.
- Use freezer containers with wide openings, so that food can be removed without thawing it first. Pack foods tightly into freezer containers to reduce the amount of air in the package. Allow room in the package for the food to expand as it freezes.

- Label all packages with the food's name, date prepared, and baking instructions, if any. Keep a list of the foods you freeze and plan to eat them within one or two months.
- Avoid overloading your freezer compartment. Foods should freeze solidly in 24 hours.

Source: K-State Research and Extension: Dining on a Dime October/November 2015 newsletter

MARK YOU CALENDAR! Cook Once, Eat for a Month Class on Saturday, February 27, 2016 at the 4-H/Sr. Citizens Building from 8:30—5:30.

February						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29					
2016						

Participants will prepare 8-10 menu items in quantity to take home to their own freezer.

There will be a registration fee for this program and pre-registration is required. Registration includes lunch, handouts, freezer

containers filled with food, and an optional cookbook. More information will be included in the next Geary County FCS newsletter.

Check out your financial savvy with this quick quiz. Circle your answers then compare them to the answers to the right of the question.

- 1) Which activity can pose the greatest threat to your wallet?
 - A. Getting a latte at Starbucks every day
 - B. Borrowing money for a car you need to get to work
 - C. Spending without a plan
- 2) If you apply for a store credit card, how do they decide if they approve you—or turn you down—on the spot?
 - A. They make sure you look good in their clothes
 - B. They check out your credit score
 - C. They make sure you have spent a set amount of money at their store
- 3) What is considered a good FICO credit score?
 - A. In the mid to high 500's
 - B. In the mid to high 600's
 - C. In the mid to high 700's
- 4) What does a phisher want?
 - A. Your personal and financial information
 - B. A romantic date
 - C. Your academic records
- 5) If someone steals your credit card and uses it, how much could you end up owing?
 - A. \$50
 - B. \$500
 - C. The total bill



C—Spending without a plan can put you in a world of hurt. Not correctly managing your finances can cause you to overdraw your accounts, go over your credit limit, and rack up excessive amounts of debt.

B—Many stores are set up to access your credit score right at the register. If you have a high score, you are usually given a credit line right on the spot. If you have a low score, you will be denied a credit line.

C—According to myfico.com, you want a credit score in the mid to high 700s in order to qualify for the best interest rates. The national average score is around 690.

A—Phishers are email scam artists who want to steal your confidential personal information. They use the information to make purchases or borrow money in your name, or access your bank account.

A—The Truth in Lending law limits your liability to \$50 if your credit card is stolen. On the other hand, you could owe \$500 if thieves get their hands on your debit card.

Healthy Habits

10 Tips to Make Healthier Holiday Choices

#1 create MyPlate makeovers

Makeover your favorite holiday dishes. Use My Recipe on SuperTracker to improve holiday recipes and get healthier results.

Go to <https://www.supertracker.usda.gov/myrecipe.aspx>.

#2 enjoy all the food groups at your celebration

Prepare whole-grain crackers with hummus as an appetizer; add unsalted nuts and black beans to a green-leaf salad; use low-fat milk instead of heavy cream in your casseroles. Share healthier options during your holiday meal.

#3 make sure your protein is lean

Turkey; roast beef; fresh ham; beans; and some types of fish, such as cod or flounder, are lean protein choices. When serving meats, trim away any fat before cooking. Go easy on the sauces and gravies—they can be high in saturated fat and sodium.

#4 cheers to good health

Quench your thirst with low-calorie options. Drink water with lemon or lime slices. Offer seltzer water with a splash of 100% fruit juice.

#5 bake healthier

Use recipes with unsweetened applesauce or mashed ripe bananas instead of butter. Try cutting the amount of sugar listed in recipes in half. Use spices to add flavor such as cinnamon, allspice, or nutmeg instead of salt.

#6 tweak the sweet

For dessert, try baked apples with cinnamon and a sprinkle of sugar instead of apple pie. Invite your guests to make their own parfait with colorful sliced fruit and low-fat yogurt.

#7 be the life of the party

Laugh, mingle, dance, and play games. Focus on fun and enjoy the company of others.

#8 make exercise a part of the fun

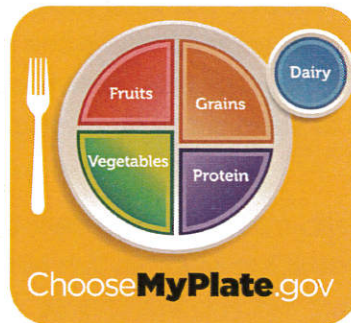
Make being active part of your holiday tradition. Have fun walking and talking with family and friends after a holiday meal. Give gifts that encourage others to practice healthy habits such as workout DVDs, running shoes, and reusable water bottles.

#9 enjoy leftovers

Create delicious new meals with your leftovers. Add turkey to soups or salads. Use extra veggies in omelets, sandwiches, or stews. The possibilities are endless!

#10 give to others

Spend time providing foods or preparing meals for those who may need a little help. Give food to a local food bank or volunteer to serve meals at a shelter during the holiday season.



Source: United States Department of Agriculture DG Tipsheet No. 32

Choose Child-Sized Portions of Holiday Fun

Not only is your time limited, but so is your toddler's attention span and stamina. Plan child-size portions of holiday activities. It is far better to have an hour of holiday fun than 4 hours of agony and regrets.

Baking cookies together can be a great family tradition, but you don't have to bake ALL the cookies together. Let your children help you with the first few batches, the ones that are easiest for little hands. Save the mega-baking for after the children go to sleep.

Schedule shopping in manageable chunks. A few hours of shopping allows time for toddlers to take in the holiday decorations and music before becoming cranky and hungry. Shopping also offers an opportunity to discuss what your children plan to give—whether store-brought or not—and not just what they want to get.

Make setting up the tree and trimming it a 2-day event, so decorating will be the main event, rather than just an ending to a long day.

Designate as "adult only" the breakable ornaments that would break your heart to see broken. Make sure there are plenty of ornaments for children to hang and that ornaments that they made themselves get highly visible positions on the tree.

If there is a story behind a decoration, share that with your children. If one of your holiday treasures is the music box your grandmother brought from Poland, tell your children how far it traveled and how long ago, and perhaps share a story about your grandmother. If dad got those trains when he was 6, he can reminisce about the first time he set them up.

Monitor TV use. Some holiday television specials are truly that; others can just be another vehicle for a cartoon character or action figure; and most are inundated with ads. Choose wisely.

Source: Cornell Cooperative Extension Service, Thompkins County: <http://cctompkins.org/family/parent-pages/leisure-time>





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Upcoming Geary County Extension Programs

**Requires pre-registration.

January

- 7 Knowledge at Noon**— Valley View Estates, 1440 Pearl Drive, Junction City, KS. Topic: Adapting to Life's Changes. This free program begins at noon and is open to the public. Call the Extension Office to reserve your seat at 785-238-4161. **Register by January 3, 2016**
- 26 MPI Parenting Class**—Junction City YMCA, 1703 McFarland Road, Junction City, is a 6-session class open to any parents with children ages toddler to teens to help support and equip parents with the challenging task of raising children. Please call the Geary County Extension office to register for the program—785-238-4161. The class consists of 6 consecutive sessions held from 8:30—10:30 a.m. on Tuesday mornings. A \$10/session registration fee is required before the class begins. The total cost for the class is \$60.00 per individual or \$90.00 for the parent and a support person. The class continues through March 1. PLEASE NOTE THIS CLASS IS BEING OFFERED IN THE MORNINGS TO ACCOMMODATE THOSE WHO WORK NIGHTS.

February

- 4 Knowledge at Noon**— Valley View Estates, 1440 Pearl Drive, Junction City, KS. Topic: Loving Long Distance. This free program begins at noon and is open to the public. Call the Extension Office to reserve your seat at 785-238-4161. **Register by February 2, 2016**
- 27 Cook Once for a Month Workshop**—4-H Senior Citizens Building, 1025 S. Spring Valley Road, Junction City, KS. Pre-Registration is required. Registration due by February 19, 2016 to the Geary County Extension office. Look for more information in the January FCS newsletter and at our website listed below. Space will be limited, so register early.

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