

# Geary County

K-STATE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION NEWS

[geary.k-state.edu](http://geary.k-state.edu)

December 2020

## Ask the Agent

**Q:** How long will home-canned tomatoes be safe to store?

**A:** If foods are preserved correctly, they are safe for years but the quality and nutritional value decreases with the passing of time. The **National Center for Home Food Preservation** recommends only preserving enough food to last one year so that your home-canned foods taste great and are nutritious when you decide to eat them.

For more information call the Geary County K-State Research & Extension office at: **785-238-4161**

**K-STATE**  
Research and Extension

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

[ksre.k-state.edu](http://ksre.k-state.edu)

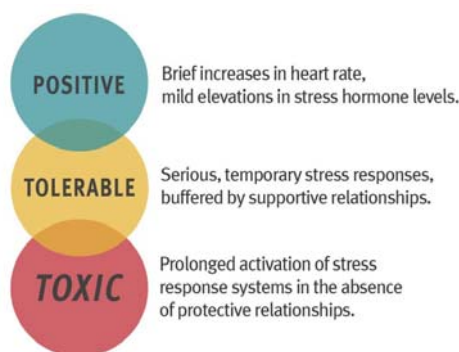
## Silent Night and Holiday Hope

December 2020

In the book *Alexander And The Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, Alexander has a day when everything goes wrong. He gets gum in his hair, trips on a skateboard, gets scrunched in the car, is deserted by his friends, goes to the dentist, and falls in the mud. At home he is scolded by his mom, gets in trouble with his dad, has lima beans for dinner, gets soap in his eye, and is left alone by the cat.



I sometimes feel like 2020 has been nearly a year of days like Alexander had. We could add to his list with: misplacing my facemask, running out of hand sanitizer, being Zoom bombed, missing family gatherings, and learning how to grieve the death of a loved one from a distance.



All of these factors contribute to a heightened, if not toxic, level of stress. Stress is your bodies' natural reaction to a demand or "stressor." Stressors may range from pressures due to daily life events (exercise, giving a presentation) to stress triggered by a negative change (loss of a job, death of a loved one) or to the occurrence of major traumatic events (a life threatening accident or involvement in an armed conflict). Stress is normal and affects everyone, though it can impact your health both positively and negatively.

*Source: Michelle Grocke, Ph.D., Health & Wellness Specialist, MSU Health and Human Development & Montana State University Extension*

Much short-term stress can be positive. Positive stress can motivate you to accomplish a goal or succeed with a challenge. Stress helps us react quickly in life threatening situations. Stress responses are designed to aid in our survival.

Long term stress, or chronic stress, can be harmful to your health when it continues past the time when the stressor occurs. Chronic stress can result from routine stresses as well as traumatic events.

Over time, chronic stress can seriously impact your health, leading to problems such as depression and anxiety, high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes.

Bad days make it hard to manage stress, be patient and show compassion. A tired, frustrated, angry person is not likely to be a good co-worker, friend, parent, or other family member. This month's newsletter is intended to help you deal with stress so that you can enjoy this season with silent nights and holiday hope.

I hope you take the time to read through and practice the exercises and use the tips offered throughout this newsletter. That way, you'll be making your personal plan to replace the stress in your life with quiet time, hope for the future and personal peace.

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

## RESPONDING TO EMOTIONAL EATING

# Families and Food

While we eat for physical hunger, we also want to recognize the other reasons we eat. It may be to celebrate achievements or special occasions or to mourn a loss. It could be in response to feeling stressed, bored, anxious, happy, or even excited.

Emotional eating is when we eat food in reaction to emotion, not just for physical hunger. Individuals of all ages – from teens to older adults – may experience emotional eating in their lives. While it can be perceived as a shameful habit, emotional eating is a normal response to life's experiences, and we can embrace it as such. We can also consider a few practical ways to protect both our physical and mental health in response to emotional eating.

- **Reassess your environment.** Do you eat emotionally on weekends? After a long day? Only in your house and never out? Considering your environment helps you plan accordingly so you are not eating emotionally in an impulsive or reactive manner, but in an intentional way.
- **Understand what leads you to eat emotionally.** Are there patterns in your eating? It may be helpful to write down what you are eating and what experience led you to emotional eating in the first place. This will allow you to notice and respond in a more healthful way.
- **Account for your feelings.** Feeling sad? Lonely? Bored? Anxious? Consider the best way to acknowledge these feelings and implement self-care measures to ease emotions. Sometimes food can help, but often it's not enough to cope with strong emotions. Taking a walk, calling a friend or family member, or

writing in a journal are a few examples that will help address these feelings, redirect your response, and can lead to better physical and mental health.

- **Eat throughout the day.** When we're undernourished or overhungry, we tend to respond by eating more than we normally would. Aim to eat balanced meals and snacks (with protein, carbohydrates, and healthy fats) including foods you enjoy, to stay full and satisfied throughout the day.
- **Don't deprive yourself of your favorite foods.** When we restrict certain foods or food groups because we perceive them as unhealthy, we tend to overindulge when we experience emotional triggers. Deeming food as a "reward" or days as "cheat days" creates the wrong mindset. Instead, eat satisfying amounts of healthier options and enjoy other favorite foods in balance.
- **Extend grace, and learn from experience.** Emotional eating is normal. Have self-compassion, and recognize it is a learning process to re-engage with hunger and fullness cues. Focus on positive changes you can make to your eating habits, and explore other coping mechanisms you can use for handling emotional responses.

We want to transform how we think about emotional eating by considering the positives, rather than only the negatives. We also want to find a way that works best for you because everyone's response to emotional eating will be different. Remember, food is meant to be enjoyed, and not only when we are hungry.

*Source: Emily DeWitt, Extension Associate for FCS Extension; and Heather Norman-Burgdolf, Extension Specialist for Nutrition and Health; University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension*



### What To Do When Stress Steals Your Peace

During stressful times, it is important to practice self-care to promote silent nights and holiday hope:

- Take breaks from reading and listening to media about the novel coronavirus. While it is important to be informed, too much media consumption can increase anxiety and stress.
- Take care of your body. Eat well and exercise. Develop a mindful practice such as meditation, deep breathing or yoga. Avoid consuming too much alcohol or using drugs.
- Maintain a schedule. Make sure you and your child are getting enough sleep and engaging in a variety of activities during the day. Do not feel stressed about starting the next school term or how the school might change its delivery model. Relax, and give yourself and your family the break they need.
- Make time in your day to unwind. Listen to music, drink tea, take a bath or read a book. Journal, color, paint or nap. Help your children identify these peaceful practices.
- Connect with your friends and family. Utilize technology such as FaceTime and Skype to talk to your loved ones. Talk to trusted friends about how you are feeling.

- Encourage your children to talk about how they are feeling about the coronavirus and the effects it is having on their day to day life.

### Stress Management with Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Have you ever had an aching back or pain in your neck when you were anxious or stressed? When you have anxiety or stress in your life, one of the ways your body responds is with muscle tension. Progressive muscle relaxation is a method that helps relieve that tension.

- In progressive muscle relaxation, you tense a group of muscles as you breathe in, and you relax them as you breathe out. You work on your muscle groups in a certain order.
- When your body is physically relaxed, you cannot feel anxious. Practicing progressive muscle relaxation for a few weeks will help you get better at this skill, and in time you will be able to use this method to relieve stress.
- When you first start, it may help to use an audio recording until you learn all the muscle groups in order. Check your local library or a bookstore for progressive muscle relaxation audio recordings.
- If you have trouble falling asleep, this method may also help with your sleep problems.

*Source: University of Michigan Health at: <https://www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/uz2225>*

# Laughter is Good Medicine!

I'm guilty of spouting random puns who no one but myself seems to find funny. I'm not too proud to laugh at my own jokes and was excited to read what the Mayo Clinic has to offer about the stress relief benefits of laughter:

"Whether you're guffawing at a sitcom on TV or quietly giggling at a newspaper cartoon, laughing does you good. Laughter is a great form of stress relief, and that's no joke.

## Stress relief from laughter

A good sense of humor can't cure all ailments, but data is mounting about the positive things laughter can do.

## Short-term benefits

A good laugh has great short-term effects. When you start to laugh, it doesn't just lighten your load mentally, it actually induces physical changes in your body. Laughter can:

- **Stimulate many organs.** Laughter enhances your intake of oxygen-rich air, stimulates your heart, lungs and muscles, and increases the endorphins that are released by your brain.
- **Activate and relieve your stress response.** A rollicking laugh fires up and then cools down your stress response, and it can increase and then decrease your heart rate and blood pressure. The result? A good, relaxed feeling.
- **Soothe tension.** Laughter can also stimulate circulation and aid muscle relaxation, both of which can help reduce some of the physical symptoms of stress.

## Long-term effects

Laughter isn't just a quick pick-me-up, though. It's also good for you over the long term. Laughter may:

- **Improve your immune system.** Negative thoughts manifest into chemical reactions that can affect your body by bringing more stress into your system and decreasing your immunity. By contrast, positive thoughts can actually release neuropeptides that help fight stress and potentially more-serious illnesses.
- **Relieve pain.** Laughter may ease pain by causing the body to produce its own natural painkillers.
- **Increase personal satisfaction.** Laughter can also make it easier to cope with difficult situations. It also helps you connect with other people.
- **Improve your mood.** Many people experience

depression, sometimes due to chronic illnesses. Laughter can help lessen your depression and anxiety and may make you feel happier.



## Improve your sense of humor

Are you afraid you have an underdeveloped — or nonexistent — sense of humor? No problem. Humor can be learned. In fact, developing or refining your sense of humor may be easier than you think.

- **Put humor on your horizon.** Find a few simple items, such as photos, greeting cards or comic strips, that make you chuckle. Then hang them up at home or in your office. Keep funny movies, books, magazines or comedy videos on hand for when you need an added humor boost. Look online at joke websites. Go to a comedy club.
- **Laugh and the world laughs with you.** Find a way to laugh about your own situations and watch your stress begin to fade away. Even if it feels forced at first, practice laughing. It does your body good.
- **Consider trying laughter yoga.** In laughter yoga, people practice laughter as a group. Laughter is forced at first, but it can soon turn into spontaneous laughter.
- **Share a laugh.** Make it a habit to spend time with friends who make you laugh. And then return the favor by sharing funny stories or jokes with those around you.
- **Knock, knock.** Browse through your local bookstore or library's selection of joke books and add a few jokes to your list that you can share with friends.
- **Know what isn't funny.** Don't laugh at the expense of others. Some forms of humor aren't appropriate. Use your best judgment to discern a good joke from a bad or hurtful one.

## Laughter is the best medicine

Go ahead and give it a try. Turn the corners of your mouth up into a smile and then give a laugh, even if it feels a little forced. Once you've had your chuckle, take stock of how you're feeling. Are your muscles a little less tense? Do you feel more relaxed or buoyant? That's the natural wonder of laughing at work." *Source: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456>*

One of the things my family enjoys doing together is having our Movie and Popcorn time on Sunday nights. Here is a short list of some of our favorite funny family movies:

- 1) Second Hand Lions (2003)
- 2) Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle (2017)
- 3) Airplane (1980)
- 4) Galaxy Quest (1999)
- 5) Sister Act (1992)

What funny movies would you add to this list?



Create a plan for your family to use healthy humor and the many other tips recommended in this month's newsletter to reduce stress and get recharged for 2021.

**Geary County**

P.O. Box 28  
119 E. 9th Street  
Junction City, KS 66441

### Upcoming Geary County Extension Programs

**\*\*Requires pre-registration. Call 238-4161 to pre-register\*\***

In following the Kansas State University's COVID-19 protocols, all Geary County K-State Research and Extension face-to-face meetings and programs have been suspended through March, 2021. However, online learning opportunities continue to expand.

February, 2021

- 2 Quick Meals for Busy Families—a healthy meal preparation series that will show participants how to prepare healthy menu options using their slow cooker. Recipes and resources will be provided to each household that registers Online registration begins on January 4. Look for more information on the Geary County K-State Research and Extension website and Facebook page after Christmas. Space is limited to 25 households. The class is free.



‘Like’ us on Facebook for the latest news from **Geary County K-State Research and Extension**, including health, wellness, and financial tips. <https://www.facebook.com/gearycountyextension/>