Greetings and Happy Almost Fall!

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Greetings and Happy Almost Fall!

Moving can be an exciting time. It can also be highly frustrating and exhausting. It is not something one should undertake during an otherwise stressful time in one’s life. But, I seem to be one of those individuals who find the more difficult path to follow. Yes, my spouse and I recently moved, as in during the first week of classes for fall semester. Totally insane. However, now that we have all of our stuff under one roof as well as all the natural light coming into the new house I will be a much more content.

The role of Extension in all of our lives really came to the forefront for me these past few weeks. Our healthy living team was at the forefront of my mind as we relied on carry-out for many of our meals during the move. On the plus side our activity level increased, but I can honestly say our intake of fruit and vegetables took a major dive in recent weeks. I also played the food safety role as I cleaned out cupboards and shelves. It is amazing how many things accumulate on shelves without notice of expiration dates. As someone who attempts to be constantly conscious of my consumption and the impact on the environment, I am sorry to admit that we contributed an unusually large amount to the local landfill. Maybe we need some Extension bulletins or fact sheets on eating healthy during the move. And, I could definitely use a reminder about food safety and expiration dates on food products.

As we started unpacking in our new house I was delighted to see old friends in the form of family heirlooms. It might sound silly to some, but just seeing the butter churn I used as a kid on the farm or my sister’s piece of framed sheet music handed on to me brought wonderful memories of family. Grandma’s baked bean bowl has a place of honor in our kitchen, along with the churn. The entire walk down memory lane became even more special when my surviving sister called and we discussed family history. How many of us take the time to record the stories told by our elders. Or do we just glaze over as we hear the story for the third time during the next family dinner. Our “stuff” does tell stories but they can sometimes be empty stories without the words to accompany them. Family records are important.

There are other types of records that are also important. I thought a lot about our Personal and Family Topic Team’s efforts in training us on those important documents. Try paying the bills at the first of the month when the home office is still buried in boxes and the computer is not yet reconnected. My husband reminded me last night that for insurance purposes after we finish unpacking we need to go through each room and re-do our household inventory. We are the lucky ones, though, we still have our stuff, and we know where to find our important documents. As the reality of the loss experienced by many in our recent wildland fires set in, I realize just how fortunate we are that it will just take as a day or two longer to access our documents. In a state the size of Idaho, I am sure many of you have at least one connection to someone whose life was touched by the fires.

Although it sounds like the recent weather system which came through may bring an end to our fire season, the losses suffered will continue. Extension can play a major role in assisting with the recovery through our programing efforts. There are so many areas in which we have expertise to assist with the recovery efforts. Think of the impacts FCS can make. I look forward to hearing your thoughts.
Intention versus Behaviors: The Role of Habits

Much of our daily lives are taken up by habits that we've formed over our lifetime. An important characteristic of a habit is that it's automatic—we don't always recognize habits in our own behavior. Studies show that about 40 percent of people's daily activities are performed each day in almost the same situations. Habits emerge through associative learning. "We find patterns of behavior that allow us to reach goals. We repeat what works, and when actions are repeated in a stable context, we form associations between cues and response" according to psychologist Wendy Wood of the University of Southern California.

What are habits?
Wood calls attention to the neurology of habits, and how they have a recognizable neural signature. When you are learning a response you engage your associative basal ganglia, which involve the prefrontal cortex and supports working memory so you can make decisions. As you repeat the behavior in the same context, the information is reorganized in your brain. It shifts to the sensory motor loop that supports representations of cue response associations, and no longer retains information on the goal or outcome. This shift from goal directed to context cue response helps to explain why our habits are rigid behaviors.

There is a dual mind at play, Wood explains. When our intentional mind is engaged, we act in ways that meet an outcome we desire and typically we're aware of our intentions. Intentions can change quickly because we can make conscious decisions about what we want to do in the future that may be different from the past. However, when the habitual mind is engaged, our habits function largely outside of awareness. We can't easily articulate how we do our habits or why we do them, and they change slowly through repeated experience. "Our minds don't always integrate in the best way possible. Even when you know the right answer, you can't make yourself change the habitual behavior," Wood says.

Participants in a study were asked to taste popcorn, and as expected, fresh popcorn was preferable to stale. But when participants were given popcorn in a movie theater, people who have a habit of eating popcorn at the movies ate just as much stale popcorn as participants in the fresh popcorn group. "The thoughtful intentional mind is easily derailed and people tend to fall back on habitual behaviors. Forty percent of the time we're not thinking about what we're doing," Wood interjects. "Habits allow us to focus on other things... Willpower is a limited resource, and when it runs out you fall back on habits."

How can we change our habits?
Public service announcements, educational programs, community workshops, and weight-loss programs are all geared toward improving your day-to-day habits. But are they really effective? These standard interventions are very successful at increasing motivation and desire. You will almost always leave feeling like you can change and that you want to change. The programs give you knowledge and goal-setting strategies for implementation, but these programs only address the intentional mind.

In a study on the "Take 5" program, 35 percent of people polled came away believing they should eat 5 fruits and vegetables a day. Looking at that result, it appears that the national program was effective at teaching people that it's important to have 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day. But the data changes when you ask what people are actually eating. Only 11 percent of people reported that
they met this goal. The program changed people's intentions, but it did not overrule habitual behavior.

According to Wood, there are three main principles to consider when effectively changing habitual behavior. First, you must derail existing habits and create a window of opportunity to act on new intentions. Someone who moves to a new city or changes jobs has the perfect scenario to disrupt old cues and create new habits. When the cues for existing habits are removed, it's easier to form a new behavior. If you can't alter your entire environment by switching cities—make small changes. For instance, if weight-loss or healthy eating is your goal, try moving unhealthy foods to a top shelf out of reach, or to the back of the freezer instead of in front.

The second principle is remembering that repetition is key. Studies have shown it can take anywhere from 15 days to 254 days to truly form a new habit. "There's no easy formula for how long it takes," Wood says. Lastly, there must be stable context cues available in order to trigger a new pattern. "It's easier to maintain the behavior if it's repeated in a specific context," Wood emphasizes. Flossing after you brush your teeth allows the act of brushing to be the cue to remember to floss. Reversing the two behaviors is not as successful at creating a new flossing habit. Having an initial cue is a crucial component.


Keyword: behavior change.

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**Four in Ten American Children Live in Low-Income Families, NCCP Researchers Report**

Four out of every ten American children live in low-income families, according to new research from the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health. This finding from the 2015 edition of the center’s *Basic Facts about Low-Income Children* fact sheet series underscores the magnitude of the problem of family economic insecurity and child poverty in the United States. Analyzing the latest available U.S. Census data, NCCP researchers find that 44 percent of children under age 18 lived in low-income families in 2013, and 22 percent lived in poor families. Low-income families are defined as those with incomes less than two times the Federal Poverty Threshold (about $47,000 for a family of four with two children) and poor families are defined as those with incomes below the threshold (about $24,000 for a family of four with two children).

Other notable findings from the 2015 edition of *Basic Facts about Low-Income Children*:

- **The number of children in economically insecure families remains far higher than it was before the Great Recession.** Although the number of children under age 18 in the U.S. has grown by less than one percent since 2007, the number of poor children has grown by 23 percent (almost three million) and the number of low-income children has grown by 13 percent (3.6 million).

- **Very large disparities in family economic security by race and ethnicity persist.** More than 60 percent of African American, Latino, and American Indian children live in low-income families, compared to about 30 percent of white and Asian children.

- **Many poor children have parents with some college education.** Forty-one percent of poor children have at least one parent with some college education.

- **Many poor and low-income children live with working parents.** Half of low-income children and 29 percent of poor children live with at least one parent employed full time, year round.

- **Younger children are more likely to live in low-income families than older children.** Forty-seven percent of all children under 3 years old live in low-income families, compared to 41 percent of children age 12 through 17 years.


Keywords: family, children at risk, poverty.
How Did Human Cooking Skills Evolve?

Dr. Christopher Kuzawa at Northwestern University found that young children’s brains require three times the energy (calories) as adults to perform the same task. For example, when adults sit and read, their brain consumes 20 percent of their calories and in young children, their brain consumes 66 percent of their calories.

Harvard biologist Richard Wrangham suggests that developing cooking skills played an important role in human evolution. It made food easier to digest and supplied us with the energy needed for our brains to grow bigger, from childhood to adulthood.

Drs Warneken and Rosati, researchers also at Harvard, have a theory on how cooking skills developed. Once humans learned how to make fire, they might have initially noticed that food that fell in the fire was better than raw food. This could have resulted in them intentionally cooking it and feeding it to themselves and their children. Over time, this resulted in bigger and smarter brains and improved cooking techniques.

An inability to control fire and cook their food may be reasons why chimpanzee’s brains did not evolve further. In a research experiment, when Warneken and Rosati gave chimps raw and cooked food, over time, the chimps learned to prefer the cooked food. But that is where their evolution ends since chimps can’t figure out how to control fire and cook their food.


Keyword: cooking.

Are We Losing Our Cooking Skills?

Since the previous article mentioned how cooking skills may have played an important role in human evolution, should we be concerned by the possible lack of cooking skills in teenagers and overall decrease in the amount of time spent cooking?
Information on young peoples’ cooking skills was collected by researchers at Lancaster University in England. They found that young people, aged 16-20, lacked the skills and confidence in their ability to cook food. Furthermore, they considered heating food in the microwave as cooking and consumed a high calorie diet, consisting mainly of pizza, chips, ready to eat meals, and fast food meals.

In these individuals, their lack of cooking skills has decreased the nutritional value of their diet and increased their calorie intake and their likelihood of becoming overweight or obese.

These findings are not limited to young adults. A 2015 Health & Nutrition Survey conducted on 1,007 adults found that many Americans are not currently spending much time cooking or preparing meals. One in five (19%) spend less than 15 minutes cooking or preparing dinner on the average weekday. Men especially are spending very little time cooking; nearly three in ten (28%) spend less than 15 minutes each day.

Swiss researchers reported in the journal Appetite, that individuals who have cooking skills consume significantly more vegetables, have more variety in their diet, and are less likely to eat convenience foods (e.g. pizza) and drink sugar-sweetened beverages.

Should cooking classes be reinstated in schools?


Keywords: cooking, diet.

What’s In Your Shopping Cart?

There seems to be a disconnect between peoples’ perceptions and actions, when it comes to eating healthy. Of the 1,007 adults that completed a 2015 Food & Health online survey, 91 percent thought about the healthfulness of their diet, and 82 percent tried to eat more fruits and vegetables.

According to Civic Science, a consumer research firm, people’s actions when it comes to purchasing more fresh foods are much different than their perceptions. When they surveyed 5,800 adults, they found that just 20 percent spent more than half of their grocery budget on fresh foods. The majority of individuals spent < 25 percent of their food budget on fresh foods.

The characteristics of the fresh food and packaged food buyers were different. Characteristics of the fresh food buyers included that they were more likely to:
• shop the perimeter of the store where fresh foods are located
• be women between 30-44 years-old
• not have children
• have household incomes > $100,000
• be concerned about organic and Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) foods

The characteristics of the packaged food buyer were that they were more likely to be:
• male and older than 45 years-old
• picky eaters and less likely to try new products
• less concerned about organic and Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) foods
• have an income that was similar to the general population ($52,000)

As a way to get more fruits and vegetables in your shopping cart try this suggestion from Dr. Brian Wansink, a food psychologist at Cornell University. Divide your shopping cart into two sections—one section for fruits and vegetables and one section for everything else. He found that this will significantly increase your purchases of fruits and vegetables.


Keywords: fruits, vegetables, healthy diet.
Gamification

Is “gamification” a new term for you? Defined as the application of game concepts to nongame fields, it is one of the newest teaching tools being incorporated in formal and non-formal education programs.

This new trend is evolving because Americans are playing games. “From the first personal computers and game console systems of the 1970s, through the rapid growth of the Internet in the ’90s and the migration to handheld devices in the last decade, games have played an important role in the lives of a growing number of people. And we’re not just talking about teenage boys.” In fact, 59 percent of Americans (188.2 million people) play video games. Only 29 percent of gamers are under age 18 and 39 percent of gamers are age 36 or older. Females represent 48 percent of gamers and 47 percent of gamers play social games.

Game technology or “gamifying” has been applied widely in education and health fields, for example learning math concepts, playing music, tracking dietary intake, and quitting smoking. Arriving later to the scene has been the gamification of financial literacy concepts. “Some argue that recent technological advances present a golden opportunity to achieve unprecedented economies of scale and scope in reaching our ever-diversifying population with financial education through games.” Others wonder if a game truly can “impair the skills and concepts necessary to navigate the complex financial decisions of real life.”

“Technological advances in gaming have been slow to spread to the personal finance field until the past decade ….” The early financial games were basically limited to the Stock Market Game™, Monopoly, and That’s Life. Due to the rise in casual mobile gaming among adults, “…more and more financial educators and policy makers are urging the field to produce games that not only entertain, but positively affect financial behaviors—such as saving, debt management and credit usage—in broader populations.”

University of Idaho Extension educators are meeting this need. Karen Richel has been actively involved in the development of the Financial Capability Simulation in Idahonia: The University of Idaho’s Virtual Campus in Second Life® at: https://educatinglotus.wordpress.com/2011/11/04/idahonia-the-university-of-idaho%E2%80%99s-virtual-campus-in-second-life%C2%AE. Luke Erickson and Lyle Hansen are on the cutting edge with several financial games, including Credit Score Millionaire and Marlon Monkey Borrows Bananas as components of their “Northwest Youth Financial Literacy Program Partnership” at: www.uidaho.edu/nw-youth-financial-ed.


Keywords: education, gaming, financial literacy.
What Makes a Game a Game?

Whether it is Parcheesi, Hide and Seek, or Candy Crush Soda Saga, games share a set of common characteristics: a goal, rules, a feedback system, and voluntary participation. According to the National Endowment for Financial Education (NEFE), there are three keys to a good game:

- **Clear goals with actionable next steps.** The players must know the rules and have at least some clear ways to take action. The enjoyment of the game is in testing out those different ways to find the best strategy.

- **The chance to solve difficult problems that push players to the edge of their ability.** If the game isn’t hard enough, there is no incentive to keep pushing to improve, and less of a feeling of reward when obstacles are overcome. This turns out to be a great opportunity for educators because, given the right curriculum, players will cumulatively increase their skill and knowledge the more they play.

- **A feedback system that shows progress and rewards continuous effort.** For example, the game Tetris, which is widely considered one of the most addicting electronic games, features three types of feedback:
  - **Visual**—the rows on the screen disappear and go “poof.”
  - **Quantitative**—the player’s score is clearly displayed on the screen in real time, e.g., the player always knows his or her score.
  - **Qualitative**—as the game gets harder, the player feels greater satisfaction.

“A game is not its content. Any subject matter can be put into a gaming context. Financial educators easily can identify goals—such as increased understanding of credit—that we could see imparted in a game, but those educational goals are separate from the game’s goals. If the game is a structure, like the frame of a house, then the content (educational or otherwise) is like the finishes and furniture inside; it can vary widely in style, organization and functionality.”

Behavior Change and Games

“While there is a fair amount of research on gaming in general, the concept of using games to affect real-world outcomes over a long period of time, as yet, lacks solid data. NEFE commissioned a Harris/Neilson survey to find out how many Americans use any kind of technology—including mobile apps, games and social media—to reach specific goals.”

Their findings revealed that:

- Over half (54%) of U.S. adults have used technology to set or achieve a goal.
- Men are significantly more likely than women to use a website (26% vs. 18%) or gaming console (24% vs. 17%) to set or achieve goals.
- Over three-quarters (77%) had success in reaching their goal using technology to set or achieve the goal.

“Done successfully, financial education games clearly outline the actionable steps needed to empower players in the game, which also can empower them to make better decisions in real life.”


Keywords: education, gaming, financial literacy.