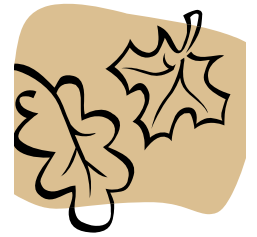


The Balancing Act

Fall 2011



Slow Cookers and Food Safety

By: Wayne Coachman, Early County

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Opening the front door on a cold winter evening and being greeted by the inviting smells of beef stew or chicken noodle soup coming from a slow cooker can be a diner's dream come true. But winter is not the only time a slow cooker is useful. In the summer, using this small electrical appliance can avoid introducing heat from a hot stove. At any time of year, a slow cooker can make life convenient by planning ahead, saving time and using less electricity.

Is A Slow Cooker Safe?

Yes, the slow cooker, a counter-top electrical appliance, cooks foods slowly at a low temperature—generally between 170° and 280° F. The low heat helps less expensive, leaner cuts of meat become tender and shrinks less. The direct heat from the pot, lengthy cooking and steam created within the tightly-covered container combine to destroy bacteria and make the slow cooker a safe process for cooking foods.

Safe Beginnings

Begin with a clean cooker, clean utensils and a clean work area. Wash hands before and during

food preparation. Keep perishable foods refrigerated until preparation time. If you cut up meat and vegetables in advance, store them separately in the refrigerator. The slow cooker may take several hours to reach a safe, bacteria-killing temperature. Constant refrigeration assures that bacteria, which multiply rapidly at room temperature, won't get a "head start" during the first few hours of cooking.

Thaw Ingredients

Always thaw meat or poultry before putting it into a slow cooker. Choose to make foods with high moisture content such as chili, soup, stew or spaghetti sauce. If using a commercially frozen slow cooker meal, prepare according to manufacturer's instructions.

Use the Right Amount of Food

Fill cooker no less than half full and no more than two-thirds full. Vegetables cook slower than meat and poultry in a slow cooker so if using them, put the vegetables in first. Then add the meat and desired amount of liquid such as broth, water or barbecue sauce. Keep the lid in place, removing only to stir the food or check for doneness.

Settings

Most cookers have two or more settings. Foods take different times to cook depending upon the setting used. Certainly, foods will cook faster on high than on low. However, for all-day cooking or for less-tender cuts, you may want to use the low

setting. If possible, turn the cooker on the highest setting for the first hour of cooking time and then to low or the setting called for in your recipe. However, it's safe to cook foods on low the entire time - if you're leaving for work, for example, and preparation time is limited. While food is cooking and once it's done, food will stay safe as long as the cooker is operating.

Power Outage

If you are not at home during the entire slow-cooking process and the power goes out throw away the food even if it looks done. If you are at home, finish cooking the ingredients immediately by some other means: on a gas stove, on the outdoor grill or at a house where the power is on. When you are at home, and if the food was completely cooked before the power went out, the food should remain safe up to two hours in the cooker with the power off.

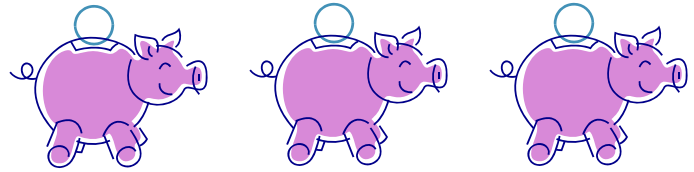
Handling Leftovers

Store leftovers in shallow covered containers and refrigerate within two hours after cooking is finished. Reheating leftovers in a slow cooker is not recommended. Cooked food should be reheated on the stove, in a microwave, or in a conventional oven until it reaches 165 °F. Then the hot food can be placed in a preheated slow cooker to keep it hot for serving—at least 140 °F as measured with a food thermometer.



Saving Spending Sharing...

By: Peggy Bledsoe, Houston County



Teaching kids the value of money can be more difficult than getting them to clean their room or eat their vegetables! It is important that children understand the three purposes of money: saving, spending, and sharing. Teach kids to put some money aside so there are funds for goals and unexpected expenses. It is also important for kids to learn to live within their means and to be wise consumers. Finally, learning to be generous and charitable to others is an important life lesson.

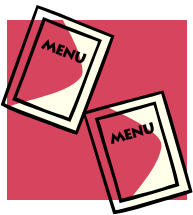
Allowances can be a teaching tool rather than a reward for doing chores. It can help children learn management skills and how to share with others. A regular allowance allows them to stretch their money from one week to the next rather than spending every penny immediately. There are many ways to structure an allowance. Each

family has to decide what will work for them in terms of when to give an allowance, how much to give and the financial responsibilities that go with it.

An allowance can begin as early as age five. Start with fifty cents or a dollar for the young ones and increase the allowance each year. As the child ages, each increase in the allowance should be linked to an increase in financial responsibility. The allowance for an older child might be a deposit in their checking account including gas money, money for clothes, and other responsibilities. The goal is to prepare your children for the realities of the financial world before they leave the nest. No matter the age of the child, it is important they understand that the money must cover needs before wants.

The allowance should be in small bills or coins that can be divided into

marked envelopes or containers identified as saving, spending and sharing. Decide in advance what percentage should be used for saving. This helps children develop the habit of paying yourself first and putting money aside before being tempted to spend it. Providing money management guidance to your children will help them become educated savers and wise consumers.



Healthy Strategies to Surviving Eating Out

By: Roxie Price, Dougherty County

Do you eat out frequently? If so, you are probably eating more fat and calories than you realize. Many restaurant meals are filled with calories and fat. There are a few healthy strategies that can make eating away from home less harmful to your health and waistline.

Know what you want before you go in. If you walk in hungry, without any idea what you want to eat, you will be more likely to order high-fat and high-sugar food.

Have it your way. Ask the person waiting on you how the food is prepared before you order it. Sometimes you can request grilled instead of fried or without salt or condiments added. A low calorie dressing for salads is also a good thing to request. Substitute a salad for fries.

Share a meal. Many restaurants serve huge portions. Sharing a meal is a good way to save calories and money. If the restaurant will not split the meal for you then ask for an extra plate.

Add to a meal. If you know you will be eating out take a piece of fruit or some sliced vegetables with you from home to add to your fast food meal. This can be done in place of "super sizing" your meal at the fast food restaurant.

Fill the doggie bag before you eat. In fact, it will be easier to control your intake if you request that the take-home container be brought to you when your meal arrives. Then you can divide the meal before you dig in.

Ask for the nutrition facts. Many restaurants now have the nutrition facts for their meals available for you. Review the facts before you consume the food. You may be very surprised when you realize just how many calories and fat are in your favorite meals. Choose a meal that may be just as appealing to your taste buds and even more appealing to your health.



Water Water Everywhere?

By: Suzanne Williams, Dougherty County



I don't know about you, but I have been more aware of the importance of water this year than at anytime during my life. As a rural Southwest Georgia resident, I have had my well go dry and paid \$300 to have it lowered. I have seen my yard turn brown and carried water to my tomato plants. As I researched this topic, I discovered that only 3% of the total water on planet Earth is fresh water and 2% of that is glacial ice. So we have literally 1% of the total water on Earth fit for human consumption.

Believe me when I say, spending one day without water can really give you a wake-up call. So how do we conserve this precious commodity? By practicing a few simple conservation measures and being conscious daily of wastage, we can protect our precious, life-giving water. Household leaks account for an average of 13.7% of our water usage. If you are a city resident, a simple way to check for leaks is to check your water meter. Record the amount and do not use any water in your house for two hours, re-check the meter and see if the read-out has changed. If it has gone up, then you have a secret leak somewhere. Toilets are the common culprits with leaks. A quick test is to put a drop of food coloring in the tank at the back of the tank. Check back in about 5 minutes and if you see color in the bowl, then a leak is probably present. Pre-1993 toilets use about 3.5 gallons and new high efficiency toilets use about 1.3 gallons. A new toilet can save about \$90 a year on your water bill.

Our daily water usage shakes out like this: Toilets 26.8%, Showers 16.7%, Faucets 15.7%, Washing clothes 21.7%, and Leaks 13.7% (conservewatergeorgia.net). The average washing machine uses 41 gallons of water per load while the new High Efficiency units use an average of 28 gallons per load. When purchasing your next washer, please consider the newer HE models. They may cost more, but the saving on your water and electricity bills will average out the cost.

So what can we do? Other water-saving tips include: installing HE toilets and washing machines, catching water in a bucket while waiting for the water to get warm in the shower (great way to water flowers), washing only full loads of clothes, turning off the faucet while brushing our teeth, running only full loads when using the dish washer, and installing a rain barrel outside to catch rain water. By doing these simple things, we can help save this precious commodity for ourselves and future generations. For more information, contact the Dougherty County Extension at 229-436-7216.



Music to Their Ears...:

CREATING MUSICAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

By: Sylvia Davis, Baker/Mitchell County

Music is a part of most young children's lives. Music is everywhere in today's society - on the radio and television, in school or child care, in places of worship, at the mall or grocery store, and often at home. Young children also seek out and create music. They make up songs and rhymes about things they enjoy, and they experiment with rhythms by beating on pots and pans. It's easy to help children develop their appreciation and ability in music, simply by giving them the time and tools to experience music.

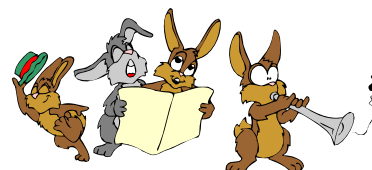
Sing. The simplest way to help children enjoy music is to sing. Sing songs to your child, and encourage him to sing along. The songs can be traditional children's songs, songs from the radio, or words you make up to familiar tunes. Don't worry if you can't carry a tune — your child will still learn to enjoy music by singing with you. If you're uncomfortable singing a cappella, sing along with cassettes or CDs. Many public libraries have collections of music and books about music that you can check out.

Listen to music. Expose your child to a variety of different artists and styles. Your child may also enjoy whatever music you like. Expose her to both vocal and instrumental music. Choose classical, jazz, big band, bluegrass, rock, country, reggae, gospel, and any other types of music. (But be sure the lyrics are appropriate for your child.) Listen to music while you're driving. Play soft music as your child is falling asleep. Take your child to a band or orchestra concert. Summer

outdoor concerts are especially fun for children. Take a picnic dinner and enjoy the music.

Make musical instruments. Playing an instrument adds a whole new dimension to your child's music-making. You don't have to spend a lot of money on fancy instruments. Your young child will enjoy the experience of creating rhythm instruments with common household tools. Empty coffee cans and ice cream buckets make wonderful drums. A sealed plastic drink bottle with a handful of pebbles or rice inside sounds like maracas. Your child can make a tambourine by gluing or stapling together two heavy paper plates, with a handful of dried beans or rice inside. Make jingle bells by attaching small bells (available at craft shops) to strips of fabric or ribbon. Encourage your child to decorate her "instruments", and put on a performance.

An appreciation for music is something children can hold onto for the rest of their lives, and the early years are an ideal time to start making music. The possibilities for music at home are limited only by your imagination. The bottom line is to help your child have fun listening to and creating music.



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Dear Friends,

The Balancing Act is a quarterly publication sent to you by Family and Consumer Sciences Agents serving all South-west Georgia. All information in this newsletter is written by Specialists at the University of Georgia and FACS agents, and is backed by research from the University of Georgia and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This newsletter brings you the latest information, please contact the agent in your county.

Thank you,

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