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Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

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Pumpkins: Not Just Another Pretty Face

Loveda C. Perry, Extension Agent



Pumpkins are not just for carving up and scaring trick or treaters with. Pumpkins are actually an excellent source of many essential nutrients.

Pumpkin carving started with the Irish. Originally, the Irish would carve turnips for their scary holiday but after coming to America the Irish found the pumpkin more abundant and easier to carve-thus creating the "Jack O Lantern".

The pumpkin is actually a squash, which is usually available in the fall. The seeds can be carved out and eaten.

There are 2 processes for preparing seeds to eat; drying and roasting. To prepare seeds for either method, first wash carefully and remove any clinging fibrous tissue.

-Drying: Seeds can be dried in the sun, in a dehydrator at 115-120° F for 1-2 hours or in an oven at 250°F for 10-15 minutes. Stir frequently to avoid scorching.

-Roasting: Toss dried seeds with oil, about 1 teaspoon per 1 cup of seeds, and salt. Roast in oven 250°F for 10-15 minutes.

Pumpkin seeds are an excellent source of phosphorus. Phosphorus is used by the body to help build strong bones and teeth. Phosphorus also helps the body to metabolize its nutrients, fat, protein and carbohydrate, into energy.

Pumpkin Nutrition

The bright orange color of pumpkin makes it easy to spot as an excellent source of Beta Carotene (β-carotene). B-carotene is a plant carotenoid that is converted to Vitamin A in the body. Everybody knows Vitamin A is essential for good eyesight, but current research is finding many more good things that it does for our bodies.



B-carotene may help to reduce the risk of certain types of cancer and protect against heart disease. Pumpkins are also a rich source of potassium, which is important for building muscle and metabolizing protein and carbohydrates. Pumpkin is naturally low in fat, 0 grams, unless added and a good source of fiber.

Choosing Your Pumpkin for Cooking

Fresh pumpkin can be substituted in recipes that call for winter squash or sweet potatoes. When choosing your pumpkin, choose the smaller pumpkin, pie pumpkin or sweet pumpkin, for cooking purpose.

The pumpkin should weight about 5-8

pounds. The bigger Jack O Lantern pumpkins are too stringy for these purposes.

When selecting your pumpkin:

- Look for one with a stem about 1-2 inches
- Avoid pumpkins with blemishes or soft spots.
- Should feel heavy-shape is not important.
- Figure 1 pound of raw pumpkin for each 1 cup of finished pumpkin.

Preparing and Cooking

If you are planning to use the seeds then smash the pumpkin against a hard surface to break open. If you are not planning to use the seeds then cut in half with a sharp knife. Remove stem, scoop out seeds and scrape away all the stringy mass.



For cooking the pumpkin choose 1 of these 3 methods.

1. Boiling/Steaming Method:

Cut the pumpkin into rather large chunks. Rinse in cold water. Place pieces in a large pot with about a cup of water. The water does not need to cover the pumpkin pieces. Cover the pot and boil for 20-30 minutes or until tender or steam for 10-12 minutes. Check doneness by poking with a fork. Drain the cooked pumpkin in a colander. Reserve the liquid to use as a base for soup. Follow procedures for Preparing the Puree.

2. Oven Method:

Cut pumpkin in half, scraping away stringy mass and seeds. Rinse under cold water. Place pumpkin; cut side down on a large cookie sheet. Bake at 350°F for one hour or until fork tender. Follow procedures for Preparing the Puree.

3. Microwave Method:

Cut pumpkin in half, place cut side down on a microwave safe plate or tray. Microwave on high for 15 minutes; check for doneness. If necessary continue cooking at 1-2 minute intervals until tender. Follow procedure for Preparing the Puree.

Preparing the Puree

When the pumpkin is cool enough to handle, remove the peel using a small sharp knife and your fingers. Put the peeled pumpkin in a food processor and puree or use a food mill, ricer, strainer or potato masher to form a puree.

The puree should be used within 36 hours or frozen to use later. To freeze puree, measure into 1 cup portions, place in ridged freezer containers, leaving ½ inch space or pack into zip closure bags. Label, date and freeze at 0° F for up to one year.

Use puree in breads, pies and other recipes. Use the puree in the same amount that the recipe calls for solid packed pumpkin.



Pumpkin can be diced and steamed to serve as a vegetable side dish. Spice it up with nutmeg to enhance the flavor.

Read more on pumpkins:

<http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu>

<http://virtual.clemson.edu>

<http://www.pumpkin-patch.com>

<http://agnews.tamu.edu>



Save Money this Holiday Season

Lisa Leslie, Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Sciences



Planning and saving money for the holiday season should be a year round project. A good plan includes developing a comprehensive holiday budget that accounts for all the holiday extras. An early start gives you a jump on bargains and time to comparison shop.

Ok, so maybe your plan is off to a slow start. Don't give up! You still have time to develop a holiday budget that is realistic for your situation. This article will discuss some planning tips to help keep you on track.

First, make a comprehensive list of all the holiday extras and their estimated cost. This will include decorations, new clothes, food, gifts, travel, charitable contributions, and any other holiday items. If you need some help making a list, download a holiday spending worksheet from our website <http://feafcs.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Remember the cost of many basic necessities has increased or is expected to increase. Gasoline, utility bills, and basic phone service are just a few examples. This might make it necessary to cut back on holiday spending this year.

Paying with Credit Cards

Consider dedicating one particular credit card for holiday spending. Set a limit and stick to it. Write your spending limit on an envelope and put it in your wallet.



When you use your credit card, write the amount on the envelope and subtract it from your limit. Put the receipts in the envelope. When you've reached your limit, stop using your credit card.

There are a few things to keep in mind when using credit. Credit card companies (even if you have a fixed rate) can raise your APR with only 15 days notice. Use your credit card as a convenience and not as extra cash. Carrying balances on your card makes the grace period disappear and can be expensive. If you tend to carry balances, paying with cash might be a better option.

Advantages of Using Cash

Paying in cash is a good way to reduce spending. We tend to think more carefully about our purchases when paying with cash. If you're concerned



about carrying too much cash, a debit card might be a good option. The money comes directly out of your bank account, so be sure to keep track. Debit cards do not come with as many protections as credit cards. Be very careful with your debit card. The best rule is to never let it leave your hand.

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Getting Your Child Off to School

by Joe Pergola
Regional Extension Family Life Faculty



According to Garret Evans, Clinical Psychologist at the University of Florida, busy work and home schedules emphasize the importance of

parenting efficiently at home. Helping your child structure their day makes it easier for everyone to get things done. It also makes the time we spend with our children more enjoyable.

Waking a child and getting through the “morning routine” is one of the most common complaints of parents. We shouldn’t be surprised. Most of us dislike the idea of getting out of a warm, cozy bed to face the pressures of the day. Children are no different. In fact, they have a few special excuses for being so grumpy in the morning. Children tend to sleep more deeply than adults. Research shows that they also need more sleep than adults, with most requiring a minimum of 8-10 hours of sleep a night.

Adding to the problem, many adults don’t get enough sleep during the week (they usually catch up on the week-end). So parents are often grumpy in the morning and in no mood to put up with such “nonsense”. Here are some tips for establishing a more pleasant morning routine:

Get up early. Many parents find it’s easiest to complete the majority of their personal morning routine before waking their children. After waking the kids, parents work on making breakfast or lunches so they can easily check up on the kids’ progress on their morning routine.



Make a chart. Parents often complain that their child always “forgets” to do something when they’re getting ready in the morning. Help your kids to remember by creating a morning routine chart.

Include things like washing their face, brushing their teeth, getting dressed, making the bed, etc. List all the morning activities you can reasonably expect your child to complete on the left side of a piece of paper.

List the days of the week across the top of the paper.

Give your child a sticker or star for every morning activity they successfully complete on time. Reward them with praise each time you give them a sticker. Give a bigger reward at the end of the morning, or for older children at the end of the week, for successfully completing a number of morning activities on time.

Some examples of rewards include:

- choosing a snack or dessert for lunch
- earning 5-10 minutes of free time before school
- and choosing a fun week-end activity (big reward).

Don’t demand perfection, especially if your child has not performed many of these activities on their own before.

- Reward them for improvements even if it just means completing one activity per day.
- Focusing on progress rather than perfection encourages your child to become more enthusiastic and take pride in completing their morning routine.



Source: Time Management for Kids. Garret Evans, Psy.D., assistant professor, Clinical Psychology, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, University of Florida.

Getting a Good Night's Sleep

Diana Converse, Family Life Faculty

With many things in our lives, we don't focus on them unless they aren't working, distress us, or are lacking. The same is true for sleep. When we are sleep-deprived, nothing seems more important than getting a good night's sleep.



The purposes of sleep

While we all experience a sense of restoration when we sleep, the purpose of sleep goes beyond that function. Scientists have been spending years trying to identify the value of sleep. Through various studies, they've theorized that sleep isn't just for rest. Sleep is basically a brain process that enhances our nervous system. It plays a critical physiological function and is necessary for intellectual development. During sleep, the brain consolidates and restructures memory and rewires its circuits to store knowledge for future use. It readies us for solutions when we awaken. We also need sleep to be alert and function effectively. In children and young adults, growth hormones get released during sleep.

Factors that Affect the Quality of Sleep

- The environment
- Bedtime routine
- Stress and change
- Substance abuse, including caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, sleeping pills
- Health problems
- What is eaten and when
- Napping

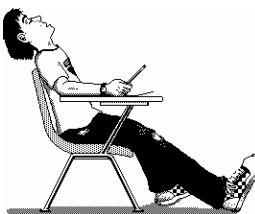


Daytime Strategies for Quality Sleep

- Get regular exercise earlier in the day to release tension.
- Avoid or limit caffeine (coffee, tea, soft drinks, chocolate and OTC drugs that contain caffeine).
- Avoid or limit alcohol and sleeping pills.
- Eat your evening meal at least two hours before you go to bed; avoid foods that could

cause heartburn or bloating.

- Keep naps to no more than 20-30 minutes; do not nap within four hours of going to bed at night.
- Deal with troubling tasks earlier in the day or evening.
- Keep a regular routine - going to sleep and wake up at the same time.
- Avoid over-stimulating television and on-line information in the evening.
- Identify the cause of your stress and work to manage it.
- Follow an effective bedtime routine.
- Be aware of health issues that can cause insomnia; depression, stress, chronic pain, sleep apnea, and restless leg syndrome.
- Check with your physician if insomnia persists for a week or two.



Tips for a Good Sleep Environment

- Keep your bedroom dark. Keep shades pulled down at night and avoid night lights.
- Reserve your bed for sleeping. Your mind should associate your bed with sleeping, not with work. Don't bring paperwork or a laptop into your bed.
- Keep your bed comfortable. Make sure that you have a good mattress. Most lose their support function within ten years of purchase.
- Shut out noise. Some people find that a white noise machine helps them fall asleep.
- Make sure that the temperature is comfortable, preferably on the cooler side.
- If you are hungry, eat a light snack (a cracker or two and some milk, for example).

Most human physical and psychological functions follow a 24 to 25 hour cycle. This is called Circadian rhythm. Sleep is the anchor for this system. When sleep patterns change, systems in the body do not function as well. The following human functions are affected by circadian rhythms: breathing, urinating, blood pressure, some hormone production, body temperature, short-term memory, and reaction time.



What is a Walk Worth?

Mary A. Keith, PhD, LD, Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

Is it true you have to walk fast to get any benefit? Do you really have to walk an hour and a half a day? How many days can you skip? How many steps a day must you take?

Let's start with *Why* we should walk, because the reason we walk can make a difference in how we walk.

If you are only walking to lose weight, to burn off the calories, then walk as slowly as you please. Surprisingly, people who walk slowly burn more calories per hour than those who walk fast. Walking slowly also takes some of the pressure off achy knees, so you can walk longer without pain.

If weight control is not your main interest, keep walking anyway. Brisk walking is defined as going at least two miles per hour, or something that raises your heart rate.



Active walking can

- lower your blood pressure,
- decrease your risk of stroke,
- lower the risk of diabetes and diabetes' side effects,
- increase stability and decrease risk of falls,
- decrease your risk of certain cancers, and most recently,
- lengthen your lifetime after a diagnosis of some cancers.

How much you walk, how long, how fast and how often, influences how much benefit you will receive. As little as 25 minutes a day, three days a week, is significantly better than no walking at all. Even deliberately walking more as you clean the house, pick up the mail and do

your weekly shopping will help.

But a week or two of sitting around with no exercise will erase a lot of the positive changes that appeared when you were walking.

If all you do is walk slowly, with no other exercise or activity, the healthful effects will be more limited. Not only will there not be as much influence on blood pressure, cholesterol or insulin levels, other problems are likely to appear sooner. For example, adults ages 70 to 79 who walked more had half as many problems walking or climbing stairs four and a half years later when they were tested again.

People who walk 5 times a week show bigger changes in their health than those who walk less often. People who also swim, bike, do weight exercises, step routines or other aerobic activities enjoy even more benefits. Aerobic exercise 2 to 3 times a week is enough to help.

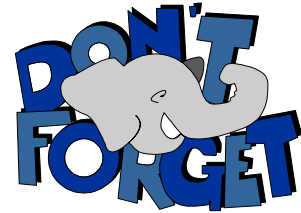
Do you need a pedometer to keep track of steps? It helps some people, and frustrates others. However, those who use them are more likely to walk further, and to walk more often, than those who don't. There's nothing magic in 10,000 steps a day. But if your usual is only 3,000 then getting to 10,000 will have a bigger effect than only getting to 4,500.

On the other hand, if your usual now is 3,000, don't try to get to 10,000 by the end of this week. Increase gradually, by about 10 to 20% a week, until you get to 10,000. The more important thing is to keep at it. Don't get to 10,000 steps for a week or two, say "I did it." and then stop walking. Make it a habit for your lifetime. The longer you maintain the activity level, the happier your body will be. The weather is getting cooler now, get moving!





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