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## Note from Nayda

Welcome to the Summer 2005 issue of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences research newsletter: Research News You Can Use. This helpful series shares up-to-date, reliable research in Family, Youth and Community Sciences with you for use in your programs.

Your input and suggestions make this newsletter better. Please let us know what you think.

Thank you to all faculty members who contributed this issue:

<a href="#">Rose Barnett</a>	<a href="#">Lisa Guion</a>
<a href="#">Linda Bobroff</a>	<a href="#">Suzanna Smith</a>
<a href="#">Elizabeth Bolton</a>	<a href="#">Jo Turner</a>
<a href="#">Mark Brennan</a>	<a href="#">Carolyn Wilken</a>
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## The Capital Accumulation Ratio as an Indicator of Retirement Adequacy

### Summary

Living longer and retiring earlier has become a dream and in some cases a reality for many Americans. With the Employee Benefit Research Institute's projection of a \$45 billion shortfall in funds needed to cover basic expenses of retirees by 2030, people are looking for a method to determine the adequacy of retirement funds. The authors of this study sought such a predictor. An earlier researcher (DeVaney, S.A. 1995) suggested that if a family held 25% of net worth in investment assets, this was a good

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## Related Resources

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indicator of being adequately prepared for retirement. There was a consensus of financial educators and planners that this percent should be a minimum of 50% of assets in investments. The thinking was that investment assets would perform well enough to out pace inflation.

1,625 households were selected from the 1998 Survey of Consumer Finances for the sample. The sample included only families who had a target retirement date, families with earned income, families with income above the poverty threshold, and a head of household age 35 to 70. The authors wanted to find out if a capital accumulation ratio would be a good indicator of adequate retirement funds. If a household at retirement age had resources equal to or greater than retirement needs, it was considered to have adequate retirement resources.

Using the ratio of 25% of net worth in investment assets 73 percent of the sample appeared to be adequately prepared for retirement. Using the 50% ratio 54% of the sample appeared to be prepared for retirement. However further analysis of adding the variable of meeting the guidelines to the logit model for retirement adequacy analysis give a different result. The 25% guideline does not appear to be a good indicator of adequate resources for retirement; despite this the 25% guideline was a better predictor than the 50% guideline. The bottom line is that a “rule of thumb” for predicting adequacy of retirement assets is probably not appropriate. More appropriate would be encouraging consumers to use online retirement adequacy calculations.

### **Implications for Extension Programming**

Given the critical nature of retirement planning, conducting programs that will help clients determine how much money should be saved for retirement and where that money should be invested would be a starting place. There are a number of publications and computer programs that can help.

Homeownership, a pension plan and Social Security are important as a base of retirement planning. But there are no simple and accurate ways to calculate retirement adequacy.

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## Related EDIS Publications

[Coalition Building Series](#)

[Community Development Series](#)

[Sustainable Community Development](#)

## Related Resources

[USDA Rural & Community Development](#)

[USDA Cooperative Research Partnerships](#)

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# Community-University Partnerships: Linking Research and Action

Savan, Beth. "Community–university partnerships: Linking research and action for sustainable community development." *Community Development Journal* 39(4): October 2004, pp. 372–384.

## Research Overview

Community-based research, which usually links university students and faculty with community groups in applied research projects, is gaining recognition as an effective mechanism for community-directed research and development. These partnerships can serve a variety of research, policy, educational and action goals. The nature of the outcomes also depends on the intensity, duration and quality of the partnership. Three types of partnership are described. Recommendations are made to encourage and sustain community –university partnerships.

## Justification

Community-based research has been gaining recognition and credibility over the past two decades. There is a growing literature, examining methodology, documenting research successes and discussing the history and philosophical underpinnings of this more publicly engaged form of investigation. Community-based research represents a range of activities, variously identified in the literature as Participatory Action Research, Action Research, Service Learning, and Science Shops. This paper examines the question: what benefits and institutional characteristics define community-based research projects operating over different time frames, and how does this affect partnership relationships?

## Implications of the Research

Three general types of community–university partnerships are identified: consultative, contractual and collaborative. Based on the research, it is clear that all three outcomes of research, policy and action are most likely to be achieved by longer-term collaborative projects, which also tend to involve students at different stages throughout their university education. Collaborative projects also provide the greatest and most diverse benefits to the community. They enhance the capacity of

## Related EDIS Publications

[Cooperative Extension Volunteer Teacher Series](#)

[Florida Association for Family and Community Education Certified Volunteer Units](#)

[Designing Educational Programs for Older Adults](#)

[Communication with Elders](#)

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[The U.S. Administration on Aging \(AoA\)](#)

community groups to engage in long-term advocacy on particular issues and to redefine issues in their own terms.

Both short- and medium-term community-based research projects are enhanced by ongoing university–community partnerships. These long-term collaborations foster the trust and shared values critical to successful work involving partners based in widely differing institutional settings. Partnerships enduring over a period of many years provide a stable context for both short consultative and medium-term contractual community-based research projects. The long-term collaborative partnerships permit a secure base for the exploration of mutually important and interesting research trails.

Community based research can be an efficient and effective mechanism for community directed research and development, combining faculty research expertise with student energy and enthusiasm and community experience of local needs and knowledge gaps. Significant benefits can accrue to all parties, providing that the institutional supports exist to recognize and foster university –community partnerships. Generally, the longer the project, the more tightly linked the partners and the more involved both (or all) partners are in all stages of the research process.

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## Effects of Volunteering on the Physical and Mental Health of Older People

Lum, T. & Lightfoot, E. (2005). *The effects of volunteering on the physical and mental health of older people*. *Research on Aging*, 27(1), 31-55.

Volunteering by older people has long been recognized as an important factor of successful aging. The work of volunteers significantly contributes to economic and social components of American life. The act of volunteering provides numerous benefits to the volunteers themselves, particularly older adults. The U.S. Census (2002) show that nearly 42% of people aged 65-74 and 39%

of people 75 years and older volunteered during the previous year. Census data shows that volunteering increases with age through middle adulthood reaching a peak in the late 60 and then tapering off. The typical older volunteer is native born with higher levels of education and income.

This research project used a national data set (Asset and Health Dynamics Among the Oldest Old Study–AHEAD) to confirm the results of earlier findings regarding the benefits of volunteering to older Americans.

The results of this study and others suggest that volunteering by older (over 65) adults:

<b>Increases or Improves</b>	<b>Reduces</b>
Mental health	Risk of disability
Physical health	Rate of mortality
Social network	Depression
Power and prestige	
Increased functional ability in later life	
Life satisfaction	
Happiness	
Self-esteem	
Self reported physical health	

This study found that performing more than 100 hours of volunteer work per year had a significant and preventative effect against poor health but that volunteering more than 100 hours did not have the same protective factor suggesting that older adults benefit from volunteering, but in a limited number of hours. In fact, research suggests that volunteering as little as 3 hours per month is related to better health.

Two propositions of role theory were used to explain the value of volunteering; particularly role enhancement and role conflict. Role enhancement occurs when individuals take on productive roles in which they assume a productive role such as volunteering, taking care of children or caregiving. Volunteering provides an opportunity to experience a sense of importance (power) and prestige, higher self-esteem, and exposes the older adult to a larger social network. The increased social network offers friends and

acquaintances that can become resources to provide support when needed or links to other opportunities or people of interest. Such involvement with others leads to increased life satisfaction and reduced depression.

Role conflict results when individuals become involved in multiple and often competing positions. Older adults who volunteer too many hours or in too many situations risk anxiety and depression as they try to find a balance between competing demands—which may also include family responsibilities or expectations, and their own energy levels.

Clearly, volunteering is a positive opportunity for older adults. Older adults who volunteer are healthier, happier, and more satisfied with their lives and their contributions to the world in which they live.

### **Implications for Extension**

Extension programs across the board rely on volunteers for a wide-range of support. Older volunteers contribute to our extension programs in myriad ways—for example, they identify local needs, make phone calls, present lessons, and advocate for extension with policy makers. Recruiting and retaining volunteers is both art and science. Florida Cooperative Extension offers volunteer development training for county educators during new agent orientation and through on-going in-services and educational support (i.e. EDIS publications).

Given Florida's wealth of older-adults this volunteer resource is ready, available, and plentiful. You've seen how your volunteers sometimes come in "looking and acting tired" but leave feeling "refreshed and rejuvenated." When you are recruiting volunteers, count on your older adults—and let them know that the role of volunteer is good for them too!

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Related EDIS  
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[Violence Among  
Children](#)

[Communication With  
Children](#)

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[NIDA for Teens  
Afterschool.gov for  
Teens](#)

[4-H Curriculum](#)

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## Communicating with Your Teenager about Staying Out of Trouble in the Summer

Summer is a time when teenagers are especially a challenge to manage. School is out; parents are at work, school-based clubs and organizations do not meet, and there are fewer opportunities to find jobs due to age or transportation restrictions. For many teens, this adds up to a long, hot summer in Florida with nothing to do except spend time with their friends.

A recent study conducted in Palm Beach County examined crimes committed by juveniles processed through Youth Court (Barnett, Mulkerrin & Jackson, 2004). By comparing arrests by month across a three-year span (2000-2003), it was found that arrests were the least frequent during the months of fall when school is first in session. They began to rise after the beginning of the calendar year, particularly in the spring. The most recent year in the analysis found sharp increases in teen first or second arrest rates over years' past from March to May. Summer months increased as well, although not as sharply, between June and September, when compared to years prior. In fact, first arrest rates in June for the most recent year are about one and a half times what they were the year prior.

These rising summer rates are enlightening for youth workers, parents and extension agents. We must strive to keep youth focused on positive daily activities and deter them from getting into trouble. By offsetting certain risks, we can help our youth make decisions that avoid mischievous or criminal activity. It is important for parents and youth workers to think about what these arrest trends tell us. These early offenses can be avoided if we help them know the risks in which they place themselves. Teens need to be made aware of the following:

1. Summer is a time for them to make good choices. This can include the pursuit of hobbies, sports or volunteer activities that they do not have the time to explore during their school year. Parents can help steer their teens in a positive direction by exploring local opportunities for involvement. They may contact their school in the spring for volunteer

opportunities, camp or recreation facilities, or local organizations, such as area hospitals, humane societies, or non-profits that may welcome youth helpers.

2. Summer is a time that places them at higher risk for getting into trouble. Parents can talk to their teens about these first crime trends early in summer to make their teens aware of the risks. It is a good idea to open a discussion with your teen so they know you understand that they may sometimes have difficulty making the right decision. It is important to make them aware, however, that a poor decision may have long-term serious effects. By heightening their awareness, when a decision arises about a potentially risky behavior, it may make them think twice before acting on it.
3. Summer is a time for family and friends. Share with your teen how special a time it is for you and for them. They will be approaching high school graduation in the next few years. This will mean that jobs or college are approaching. It is time for them to relax, spend quality time with friends and family, and treasure the vacation time they have off from school. This is important to stress in a positive manner, so they realize that their time with you to help guide them is getting shorter. They will soon need to make good decisions on their own. By emphasizing your trust in their ability to make good decisions, they will be more likely to live up to your expectations.

Reference:

Barnett, R.V., Mulkerrin, K.H. & Jackson, T.L. (2004). A Research-Based Evaluation of Palm Beach County Youth Court. Gainesville, FL: Dept. of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, IFAS, University of Florida.

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## Related EDIS Publications

[Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating the Community Leadership Program](#)

[Community Boards](#)

[Community Development Series](#)

## Related Resources

[UF Nonprofit Organization and Leadership](#)

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# Nonprofit Organizations and County Cooperative Extension

Nonprofit organizations are a large and important part of the economy of Florida. According a study prepared for Philanthropy & Nonprofit Leadership Center (2002), the economic contributions of Florida's nonprofits are considerable.

**For example, the report notes that Florida's nonprofits:**

- Number more than 50,000
- Employ directly approximately 430,000 people
- Generate an additional 360,000 jobs as a result of spending by the organizations and their employees.
- Comprise the state's sixth large source of employment among all industry sectors.
- Hold assets exceeding \$63 billion
- Receive more than \$43 billion in annual income
- Generate more than \$22 billion in total personal income
- Generate more that \$61 billion in total economic activity
- Have grown faster than the state's overall economy (an increase in expenditures of approximately 140 percent from 1988 to 1998 compared to an 87 percent increase in Florida personal income).
- Attract 88 million hours of volunteer time, equal to the work of more than 42,000 full-time employees. (p. 3)
- Government officials, community organizers and the public are beginning to recognize the potential of nonprofits as agencies that can provide services not otherwise provided.

**In this society there are three avenues for providing for people's needs:**

- The individual through his/her initiative and enterprise works to support himself and his family.
- The government provides for those services, which are too large for an individual to support such as roads, police protection, law enforcement, water quality and many more.

- The nonprofit sector is the other means by which people's needs are met that do not fall into either of the two categories. Government cannot provide for every unmet need because the tax base is never large enough for every worthy cause and program.

In addition to providing for unmet needs, Salamon, (1999) notes that nonprofits provide: "collective goods that only a portion of the community wishes to support" (p. 16). This means that support for a nonprofit's mission is not mandatory but depends on the wishes of the individual or organization giving the funding, volunteer service or tangible products.

County Cooperative Extension faculty is in a unique position to multiply their outreach and resources by partnering and collaborating with local and regional nonprofits. Nonprofits represent a target audience of organizations with common educational needs and interests. Of the 50,000 nonprofits in Florida, every type of enterprise is included cutting across a broad spectrum of social issues, environmental concerns and target audiences ranging from child welfare advocacy to health care for animals and many more. Each year county extension faculty works with these organizations in delivering educational programs to clients and communities. These organizational contacts are important for a number of reasons.

- Contact with one individual establishes a link for potential dissemination of information to other individuals either directly or through third party contacts.
- Opportunities for programming partnerships may emerge so that Extension may have one or more collaborators in program delivery or evaluation.
- Issues and needs are identified by these organizations that may be met through extension programming.
- These organizations may bring resources to the collaborative effort that strengthens Extension's role and multiplies each organization's contribution.

## Related EDIS Publications

[Program Development](#)

[Elder Companion Series](#)

[JobStart Series](#)

## Related Resources

[Center for Program Evaluation and Organizational Development: Extension Specialists](#)

[Evaluating Extension Programs](#)

- The board members of the nonprofit may be good advisory members for Extension.

Philanthropy & Nonprofit Leadership Center. (April 2002). Economic contribution of Florida nonprofit organizations: A resource for the public good. Winter Park, Florida: Rollins College.

Salamon, L.M. (1999). America's nonprofit sector: A primer. Second edition. New York: The Foundation Center.

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## A User-Friendly Approach to Program Evaluation and Effective Community Intervention for Families at Risk of Homelessness

By Elizabeth A. Mulroy and Helenann Lauber

In Social work / Volume 49, Number 4 / October 2004, p. 573 – 586

### Background

#### Neighborhood Characteristics

The mission of Parents and Children Together (PACT) non-profit organization is to promote and support healthy individuals, families, and communities by creating opportunities for them to identify and address their own strengths, needs, and concerns and to realize their potential. The PACT and its programs are located on-site at Kuhio Park Terrace (KPT) public housing project in urban Honolulu, Hawaii, a development of about 2,500 very low-income people, largely immigrants. The demographic profile of residents was similar to other public housing project in large cities: 94 percent were people of color; 68 percent of families were headed by single parents; 80 percent received public assistance; and the average annual family income was \$11,412 in a city where the median income family of four was \$60,400.

The neighborhood had an unemployment rate of 11.5 percent,

whereas the state experienced a 5.7 percent unemployment rate as the national rate dipped to 4.1 percent.

### **Program Goals**

The goal of the demonstration grant program focused on for this evaluation study was to help prevent homelessness among at-risk, very low-income families living in a large public housing development. More specifically, the program's target population was very low-income families, residing in KPT, who were at risk of being evicted.

The conceptual definition of preventing homelessness meant helping those at risk of homelessness stabilize their tenancy by remaining in the public housing complex in good standing or moving out of KPT in good standing to another apartment if that was their choice.

Potential program participants were believed to have multiple barriers to personal and material independence. They were less likely to move out of public housing in good standing or off TANF roles and into wage working than people with fewer barriers who were more easily served by traditional job training programs.

By the end of the three-year period, the center expected a majority of participants to have stable housing and move towards a job, and for the entire public housing community to experience an increase in civic pride and in resident participation. Staff included professionally trained managers and local community workers familiar with the multiple cultures and languages represented by resident groups.

### **Program Components**

The program planners and evaluators developed a detailed logic model that guided program development, implementation and evaluation. Several program components were developed to achieve the overall program goals and objectives. These program components were set against a timeline. The program components are multi-faceted and attack the problem of risk of homelessness from different angles. They include:

- Worker Development: Job Readiness Training and Job Skills Training.

- Educational/Life Skills: Learning Center, Computer Classes, Lending Library, Budgeting Classes, /Nutrition Classes, Literacy Programs, and Volunteer Training.
- Family Strengthening: - Parenting Classes, Parent/Child Activities, Wellness Workshops, Emergency Rent, Food, Transportation, Furniture, Crisis Counseling, Information/Referral, and Advocacy.
- Community Improvement: School-linked Programs, Community Celebrations, Recreational Activities, Community Liaison Council, Volunteer Coordination, Enhanced Partnership with Community-based Groups, and Community Newsletter.

## **Methods**

An action research approach was used because it was consistent with the evaluator's approach to knowledge building; afforded site-level analysis for an in-depth examination of the social context; was compatible with staff's interest in participation; and facilitated the use of multiple methods that best fit the research question and the complexity of the context with the resources available.

Data were gathered from multiple and diverse sources: review of the center's case files, archival records, program documents, focus groups, interviews, participant observation, and a "physical artifact" timeline.

Multiple methods of data collection and data analysis were used. Focus group data and the Resident Participation Time Line (RPTL) were analyzed using traditional focus group methods. Quantitative methods were used to analyze tenant housing histories, rent payment, schedules, and evictions.

## **Findings**

The evaluation reported in this article occurs during the second year of the three-year demonstration project. For the purposes of this newsletter article, the focus will be exclusively on outcomes related to the work development component. Readers can refer to the actual journal article for information on the other outcomes that were evaluated. Those outcomes primarily relate to the results of intensive two-year case studies of three program participants. The study sample for the workforce development component consisted of 24 of 31 clients of the PACT family center who

completed job readiness and job skills workshops. The reported outcomes are as follows:

By the end of the second year of the program sixteen heads of household (67 percent) were engaged in some form of employment: seven (29 percent) had full-time employment in on job; five (21 percent) were employed in multiple jobs working both full-time and part-time; three (13 percent) were engaged in part-time work; one (4 percent) worked part-time while also attending community college and volunteering. Of those not yet working, five (21 percent) were engaged in volunteering; 2 (8 percent) were enrolled in community college and volunteering, and one (4 percent) was in late-term pregnancy and out of the labor market.

### **Application to Extension**

This article served to re-emphasize some important issues in program planning and evaluation. First, programs should have adequate dosage of the treatment (education). A series of workshops were held to teach job readiness and job skills, not just one-shot sessions. For programs working with very at-risk audiences, the programs should be comprehensive as well. In this project, as evidenced by the program components, the program looked holistically to incorporate other features such as community development and family strengthening. Traditionally, programs focusing on reduction of homelessness focus on work development and/or housing security issues solely. Also, to help residents reach their goals, practitioners formed partnerships with other agencies to meet other pressing/basic needs the participants had.

Second, it is important to set realistic objectives that take into account the target audience. In this study, the audience was very low-income individuals at-risk of being evicted from public housing. Thus, there are many barriers they may face as well as many factors that may contribute to their current situation. Likewise, there should be multiple measures of success that have broad range. This study did not just focus on whether they had a full-time job at the end of the two year period, but also looked to other measures such as volunteering, taking classes, etc. Even part-time work was broken down into steady, ongoing work, or occasional, less consistent work. There may be some unintended outcomes also. So, a case study, as used in this study, with one or two of the participants may be warranted to really intimately

## Related EDIS Publications

[Size Up Your Portions](#)

## Related Resources

[MyPyramid Materials](#)

[New Rules for Nutritious Meals](#)

[MyPyramid.gov](#)

examine changes that occur in the lives of those participants due to their program participation.

Finally, this article also highlighted the importance of logic modeling in both program planning and evaluation. Community-based programs can increase their effectiveness by creating a program model based on sound logic, then critically examining and improving work processes and products systematically. Logic modeling offers promise as an analytic framework to help practitioners and evaluators develop baselines, move toward better outcomes, and monitor program management.

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## Portion Sizes and Risk for Overweight and Obesity

For the first time in the history of the U.S., the majority of Americans (55%) are overweight and nearly one in three Americans is obese (USDHHS 2005). Increasing incidence of overweight is an issue for men and women, among all age groups, and in all racial and ethnic groups. Along with the psychological challenges of being a large individual in a society that places great value on slimness, there are numerous health consequences associated with obesity, including type 2 diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia, cardiovascular disease, stroke, certain kinds of cancer, gallbladder disease, and osteoarthritis (USDHHS 2005).

Overweight and obesity have complex etiologies that include genetic factors as well as an array of environmental influences. Poston and Foreyt (1999) present an interesting discussion about the role of environment in the obesity “epidemic” in industrialized countries. They suggest that in most of our history as human beings, it has been a favorable genetic trait to be able to store excess calories easily as body fat, which then could be used during times of famine. Clearly, in our society, in which for most people food is plentiful all of the time, this genetic trait is a disadvantage. Since we cannot change our genes, we are obliged to change our environments in ways that promote healthful and appropriate food intake and physical activity. One environmental factor that has

been the subject of considerable research efforts in recent years, and the focus of public attention, is the portion sizes of food consumed in this country.

### **Trends in Energy Intake in the U.S.**

There is substantial evidence from national food consumption surveys and food disappearance data that the amount of total energy intake of Americans has increased over the past several decades. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported changes in calorie intake from 1971 to 2000 (CDC 2004). U.S. women increased their daily calorie consumption by 22 percent between 1971 and 2000, from 1,542 calories per day to 1,877 calories per day. During the same period, the calorie intake for men increased by 7 percent from 2,450 calories per day to 2,618 calories per day. With no change in physical activity, this increase in energy intake can result in a weight gain over one year of 35 pounds for women and 18 pounds for men.

Looking at beverage intake from 1977 to 1978 and 1999 to 2001, researchers found that both the number of servings and the portion sizes of sweetened beverages—major sources of “empty” calories in the American diet—have increased in all age groups, from ages 2 to 18 years to those 60 years and older. Energy intake from sweetened beverages increased 135 percent during this period, from 3.9 percent to 9.2 percent of energy intake. At the same time, energy intake from milk decreased 38 percent (from 8 percent to 5 percent of calories) (Nielsen 2004). These changes were associated with a 278-calorie increase, theoretically producing a 29-pound weight gain in one year. Cutting down on sweetened beverage consumption and replacing it with water and/or diet soft drinks would seem to be an easy way to reduce excess caloric intake in both children and adults.

### **Changing Portion Sizes**

Food portions in the marketplace and in the home have increased during the past 20 years. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) compared the size and caloric values of a number of commonly eaten foods and the amount of physical activity needed to burn the extra calories in the later version of each food (NHLBI):

Food	Calories in Portion Size of 20 years ago	Calories in Portion Size of Today	Activity Needed to Burn Excess Kcal
Bagel	140	350	Rake leaves 50 minutes
Cheeseburger	333	590	Lift weights 90 minutes
Spaghetti and meatballs	500	1,025	Houseclean 2 hours & 35 minutes
French fries	210	610	Walk leisurely 70 minutes
Soda	85	250	Work in garden 35 minutes
Turkey sandwich	320	820	Ride bicycle 85 minutes
Muffin	210	500	Vacuum 90 minutes
Pepperoni pizza	500	950	Play golf (walking and carrying clubs) 1 hour
Popcorn	270	630	Water aerobics 75 minutes
Cheesecake	260	640	Play tennis 55 minutes

Surprisingly, Americans appear to be unaware that portion sizes have increased over the years. In a USDA study, 62 percent of respondents said that portion sizes in restaurants were about the same or even smaller than they were 10 years earlier, and 80 percent said that the portions eaten at home were also about the same or smaller (Medical College of Wisconsin 2003). This phenomenon has been termed “portion distortion.” People perceive large portion sizes as “normal” or “typical” and do not realize that they are far greater than portion sizes used to be. Increasing awareness of portion size is an important goal for nutrition education.

## Portion Size and Food Intake

It is one thing to be served larger portions, but another to choose to eat what is served. What influence does portion size have on food actually eaten at a meal or snack? There is evidence in the literature that, even in young children, larger portion sizes result in increased caloric intake.

McConahy et al., (2004) evaluated data from the Continuing Survey of Food Intake by Individuals (CSFII) 1994 to 1996 and 1998, to determine the effect of food intake behaviors, including portion size, on daily energy (kcal) intake in a nationally representative sample of 5,447 preschool-aged children. Energy intake and body weight were both positively correlated with number of eating occasions, number of foods consumed, and portion size. Portion size accounted for the greatest amount of the variance in energy intake in the preschoolers. In other words, those preschoolers who were served the largest portions ate the most. The most common foods consumed by both 2 to 3 year-olds and 4 to 5 year-olds were: milk (91 percent and 93 percent, respectively), bread (81 percent and 86 percent), soft drinks (72 percent and 79 percent), cereal (71 percent and 72 percent), juice (47 percent and 41 percent), cookie (42 percent and 46 percent), French fries (32 percent and 33 percent), banana (30 percent and 25 percent), peanut butter (28 percent in each group), and macaroni and cheese (28 percent and 19 percent) (McConahy 2004).

In another study, researchers looked at the relationship between portion sizes and body mass index (BMI) in young people. They examined food intake of 4,408 children and adolescents as reported in the 1994 to 1996 and 1998 CSFII. Excluding “implausible” energy intake responses resulted in a sample of 1,995 children and adolescents (1,005 boys and 990 girls). Average portion size was positively correlated with BMI percentile in boys 6 to 11 years of age and in boys and girls 12 to 19 years of age (Huang 2004).

Students at Cornell University participated in a study that examined their food intake when served a meal of four foods at portion sizes of 100 percent, 125 percent, or 150 percent of the amount of food that the students had consumed at a buffet the previous week. When served the larger portions, the students ate

more of each food, and their total caloric intake exceeded the amount they consumed when previously allowed free access to the food on the buffet. This study suggests that portion sizes can influence energy intake at a meal (Levitsky 2004).

Rolls and colleagues determined that portion size significantly influenced the amount of food eaten by both male and female college students at a lunch meal (Rolls 2004). The 75 students were given each of four sizes of a deli-style sandwich (6, 8, 10, or 12 inches) once a week for four weeks, and told to consume as much or as little of the sandwich and water as they wanted. They were instructed to eat the entire amount of salted potato chips and a 5-gram chocolate mint that were served with the sandwich; these provided 100 kcal. The amount of the sandwich that the subjects consumed and the total energy intake from the meal increased significantly with the size of the sandwich. This change was more pronounced among the males, who ate 56 percent more energy (355 kcal) when served the 12-inch versus the 6-inch sandwich. The females consumed 31 percent more energy (159 kcal) when given the 12-inch sandwich, which was a significant increase.

In a seven-week study, 42 women ages 19 to 45 years were instructed to consume one of six first-course salads in its entirety before eating a pasta lunch. The salads varied in portion size and energy density. The lowest energy intake occurred following ingestion of the salad lowest in energy density. Energy intake increased 8 percent and 17 percent for the small and large portions, respectively, of the high-energy-dense salad. However, consuming a large portion of the low-energy-dense salad decreased the amount of pasta that was eaten and the overall energy intake for the meal. The researchers suggest that eating a large portion of a low-energy-dense food (like a green salad) at the beginning of a meal may be a successful approach for managing food intake and weight management (Rolls 2004).

In another study of young adult food intake, Rolls and colleagues (2002) examined the effect of portion size on food intake at a single meal. On four separate occasions, the subjects were given four portions of macaroni and cheese (portion sizes were 500 grams, 625 grams, 750 grams, or 1,000 grams); each portion size was larger than a typical intake based on clinical observations. The subjects

were divided into two groups. One group received their food on a plate, and members of the other group were able to serve themselves from a bowl, family style. Not surprisingly, the researchers found that caloric intake was significantly related to portion size. In both the plated and the bowl groups, subjects ate about 30 percent more energy (kcal) when served the highest versus the lowest portion of macaroni and cheese. These results were not impacted by body mass index, gender, or high scores on dietary restraint or disinhibition tests.

Eating away from home has been found to contribute to excess caloric intake and is likely to be a contributor to overweight and obesity. Diliberti and colleagues (2004) examined the effect on energy intake at a meal of altering portion size of a cafeteria-style restaurant pasta entrée. The size of the entrée varied from 248 grams (a standard portion) to 377 grams on different days, with no change in price. Portion size significantly increased the energy intake of the pasta by 43% (172 kcal) and of the meal by 25% (159 kcal). Customers eating both size entrées rated the appropriateness of the portion size similarly.

### **Super Sizing**

The National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity (NANA 2002) has identified “value marketing” as a significant cause of overeating in this country. Value marketing encourages consumers to purchase larger portion sizes for a small increase in cost, making the customer feel that he or she has gotten a bargain. The cost to companies of the increased portion size is very small since the actual cost of the food is only about 20 percent of retail cost, and therefore larger portions generate larger corporate profits.

In fast food establishments, this practice includes what is known as “bundling.” This is the practice of adding high-profit-margin side dishes (e.g., French fries) and drinks to an entrée. On top of that, consumers are offered the “opportunity” to upgrade to a large or “super” sized portion that provides more calories than almost any consumer does actually need. So what is the cost of “value marketing,” “bundling,” and “super sizing” to consumers? Since the research shows that larger portion sizes lead to greater energy intake, super sizing is likely contributing to overeating and increased body weight.

## Implications for Extension Programs

More and more, consumers are living in an environment that promotes overeating. Extension educators can help people of all ages to select appropriate portion sizes of a variety of healthful foods for a diet that meets their nutritional needs without exceeding their calorie requirements for a healthy weight. This is one goal of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 and the new USDA Food Guidance System (MyPyramid), the two cornerstones of federal nutrition policy (available at <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov>). MyPyramid educational materials are available on the CNPP website, and the state Extension office is adapting some of these for Florida. We also are developing new educational materials for adults, children, and youth that can be used in a variety of program settings. These materials are designed to help consumers make healthy food choices that meet nutritional needs and promote healthy body weights.

Although the new food guidance system does not include “servings,” you can use the total quantities of food recommended to help people select portions or helpings that spread out their intake of foods from each food group throughout the day. With the rise in obesity, it is important to help people recognize portion distortion and learn to select “reasonable” portion sizes. With our hands-on approach to nutrition education, Extension can play an important role in helping consumers of all ages make healthy and enjoyable food choices.

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## Starting School: Stress and Success

Starting elementary school or moving up to middle school or high school can be stressful. These are big life transitions for children and teens. Usually the stress is greatest during the beginning days and weeks of the new school year. Parents are very important in helping their children manage stress and get the new school year off to a good start.

### Making Transitions

Stress occurs when life's challenges place demands on our bodies, minds, and relationships. Transitions are usually stressful because they force people to change the ways they have been doing things. When people make transitions they have to reorganize their routines and meet new people, take on a new role and even think differently about themselves. Children and parents make transitions as their children move through the school years. This report summarizes the transitions, stresses, and things parents can do to ease transitions for children in the elementary and middle school years.

### Starting School

In recent years in the U.S., there has been a great deal of discussion about school readiness that points to children, schools, families and communities all playing an important role in preparing children for school. This concept is used to describe a child's readiness to learn and to be successful in the school environment. Debates over the concept of readiness have pointed out that at age 5 there is considerable diversity in children's development and previous learning experiences. (For a review of the debates over what defines readiness for school, see Saluja, Scott-Little, & Clifford, 2000.)

According to the recent report, *Getting Ready* (Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2005, p. 15), the consensus of a wealth of research studies is that school readiness goes well beyond purely cognitive measures and should be measured and addressed across the following five distinct but connected domains:

- Physical Well-Being and Motor Development

- Social and Emotional Development
- Approaches to Learning
- Language Development
- Cognition and General Knowledge

Kindergarten teachers surveyed in the U.S. “agree that physical well-being, social development, and curiosity are very important for kindergarten readiness. In addition, teachers want kindergartners to be able to communicate needs, wants, and thoughts and to be enthusiastic and curious when approaching new activities. Teachers also place significant importance on skills such as the ability to follow directions, not being disruptive in class, and being sensitive to other children’s feelings” (Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2005, p. 15). In summary, a major part of being ready to start school is being physically healthy, rested and well nourished. Other important factors include children’s abilities to communicate their needs and thoughts verbally, to relate to others, and to show curiosity and enthusiasm for learning (Dockett & Perry, 2002).

Other studies illuminate what children and parents find most important about starting school. Dockett and Perry (2002) found that children in their Australian study were most concerned about being able to follow the rules set forth by the school so that they could function well and keep out trouble. Children were also keenly aware of how they felt about the transition (happy, scared), and emphasized the importance of making friends. Parents were most concerned about a child’s social adjustment—their ability to be accepted into the group, as well as to meet their individual needs in the school environment.

Certainly part of the transition to school involves being prepared with basic numbers, shapes, and letters. However, a big part of the transition is also being able to:

- Interact well with others,
- Follow instructions and have some degree of self control
- Manage things independently like put away a backpacks, and
- Adjust to the classroom environment and routine away from home.

Many children are now enrolled in preschool programs and already know some of the rules such as how to sit in a circle, stand in line, and listen to the teacher. They already have the experience of being part of a group, and being away from home in a classroom setting for at least part of the day.

However, for young children starting elementary school, the transition to kindergarten is still a change and stress may be brought on by:

- Longer days away from parents
- A more structured classroom routine
- Being separated from friends

The sections on Preventing Stress and Managing Stress discuss ways parents can help during this transition.

### **Moving Up to Middle School**

Moving up in school to middle school is a big transition for children (Elias, 2001). Not only are they exchanging a familiar environment for a foreign place but many are also experiencing other developmental changes associated with the transition to adolescence and puberty such as changes in physical appearance and the onset of menarche (Doswell, 2002).

Children transitioning to middle school express a kind of “fearful excitement.” They know they are on the brink of something big, but are anxious about leaving the comforts of elementary school (Lucey & Rey, 2000, p. 194). They will be leaving their smaller classrooms, the family friendly atmosphere of the elementary school, the feeling of belonging because teachers know their students, and the closeness of friendships developed over the years.

The first problem middle school students often face is “finding their way around a strange building.” Middle schoolers also fear getting lost, finding and opening lockers, and bringing the right materials to each class. They may also have to travel longer distances to school. In this larger environment, they must interact with more students and teachers (National Middle School Association, 2005) as well as eat in a larger cafeteria and “change clothes in a crowded locker room” (Elias, 2001, p. 1). Some students experience bullying or harassment, conflicts with

teachers, being disciplined, and thefts of their belongings (Elias, 2001). The new student is faced with the task of finding a peer group, often among many unfamiliar faces. There are higher expectations for academic performance and individual responsibility (National Middle School Association, 2005).

The period of preadolescence (ages 9-11) can also be difficult because of exposure to risky behaviors such as alcohol and drug use; the initiation of early sexual activity and risk of STDs; and an increase in sports related injuries. Girls are particularly vulnerable to damage to self esteem and pressures to hurry out of childhood to mature womanhood and conform to cultural pressures regarding body shape, clothing, and adult behavior (Doswell, 2002; Elias, 2001). Other children are affected by particular problems such as a parent's divorce, financial pressures, and domestic violence. They are adding the school transition to an already stressful situation.

### **Stress and School**

Although school transitions may be stressful, this stress is not necessarily bad. Stress can be good if it motivates students to do their best or energizes them to try new things. However, stress can be detrimental when it overwhelms students and they feel that they can't deal with the pressures of life (Smith & Pergola, 2003). With too much stress, children may become anxious and fearful. Too much stress can create problems with their physical and mental health, their relationships with their peers, and their school performance (DeNoon, 2002).

Parents, teachers and coaches can be on the lookout for signs of stress:

- Headaches
- Stomach aches
- Nightmares or bad dreams
- A noticeable change in behavior such as withdrawing or being more aggressive than usual
- Crying or temper tantrums
- Eating disorders, drug or alcohol abuse
- Keeping to oneself, spending excessive time on the Internet, focusing on unusual interests or cultures

In addition, as time goes on and stress is unresolved, parents may observe continued strain, lower than expected grade point average and negative social behavior ratings or remarks by teachers (Richardson, 2002).

## **Preventing Stress**

Supportive parents and teachers make the transition to school easier for children of all ages (Lucey & Reay, 2000; Schmeelk-Cone & Zimmerman, 2002). There are certain things parents can do to prevent stress, no matter what the child's age.

**Help children prepare for the change.** Children are less fearful when they know what to expect. Many schools now help parents and students get ready by offering open houses and meet-the-teacher days. Go to the elementary school's day to meet the teacher or any special programs for incoming kindergarteners. Families of students entering middle school or high school can plan to go to open houses in the spring and orientation programs before the fall session begins. This helps students get acquainted with the school's physical lay out and the teachers.

**Talk about school.** Help your younger children talk about the day by asking simple questions. For teenagers, being there for them when they are ready to talk and ask about the day to open up conversation. It is important to be sensitive to the anxieties that go along with these changes.

**Keep normal household routines.** Give children a safe, predictable, and stable routine. Young children in particular like routines, such as the same dinnertime, bath time and bedtime. This helps them know what to expect of the day and evening.

**Encourage your child to keep old friends and make new ones.** For middle school students, starting school with a friend makes the change easier. Children able to make new friends perform better in school, so help your child think of ways to meet new people. (Lucey & Reay, 2000) Help adolescents find positive relationships with friends with similar interests and abilities, and with whom they feel safe and accepted (Elias, 2001).

**Be positive.** Help children see the upcoming changes as exciting and fun (but accept a child's nervous feelings too). Thinking and

being positive helps children and adults deal with stress better. Don't talk to children about your own anxieties; this will only add to their stress. Instead, talk to a friend or partner.

**Spend time together.** Be extra supportive during the first week or so of school. Do things you enjoy as a family and listen carefully to how things are going for your child. Do something to make your child feel special, like sending messages in a lunch box (elementary age) or celebrating the successes of the first week of school (middle and high school) with a special dinner or family night. The first week and throughout the school year, schedule a regular family meeting to get ready for the week at school and work (Ohanesian, 2002).

**Help children develop organizational skills.** Even at a young age children can begin to learn organizational skills and responsibilities that will help them throughout the school years. They can break down projects into smaller tasks, make simple lists, and keep a planner.

**Help others.** Children of all ages benefit from making contributions to others in their community. Adolescents in particular may thrive on being involved in things that give them a sense of purpose and identity, such as cleaning up neighborhoods or building affordable housing, protecting the environment, working in soup kitchens, and teaching or coaching younger children (Elias, 2001).

## **Managing Stress**

Children need coping skills to deal with the stress of starting school (NEA, 1999). Children who know how to solve problems are better able to handle difficulties that they are bound to face when they enter the school (NEA, 1999). Parents can help their children think things through and learn to get help when needed. For example, if your kindergartener has to use the restroom, does she or he know to ask to be excused? If your middle school student is lost on campus can she or he ask for directions, or follow a map provided by the school?

Children also do better when they can control their emotions and resolve conflicts with peers. These are skills that children begin developing in the early years, usually through a parent's example

(NAE, 1999). There is some evidence that emotional intelligence is helpful for students transitioning to middle school. They tend to understand and manage their own feelings and the feelings of their peers, tolerate frustration, control their impulses and stay focused (Richardson, 2002). Students with higher levels of emotional intelligence are able to cope and adapt more easily.

Parents can follow these suggestions for helping children manage the stress of starting school:

Manage your own stress. Children often pick up on their parents' anxiety and this becomes another stressor.

Stay calm. When under stress, children and parents need to try to stay calm. Take deep breaths. Talk to yourself and say, "I can get through this" or "It will be okay."

Teach children and teens ways to cope with challenges and manage their own stress.

Communicate and be available. Listen to your children and teenagers when they talk. Help them identify and express their feelings in positive ways (Richardson, 2002). Show your love and acceptance and avoid criticizing them (DeNoon, 2002). Make yourself available (Arbona & Power, 2003). Like younger children, teens need to be able to talk to their parents, often about "heavy" issues. Parents need to show that they care, are willing to listen, and believe in them (DeNoon, 2002).

Seek help if needed. Most children feel anxious the first day or two of school. If these feelings continue for more than a month or two (Elias, 2001) and the child is having nightmares, headaches or stomachaches, wants to come home during the day, or is sad or withdrawn, there may be more serious problems. Consult your pediatrician or a mental health professional (Lerche Davis, 2001).

## **Conclusion**

Starting school or moving up to middle school can be stressful. This is a life transition that challenges students and their families with many changes.

Parents need to watch out for signs of stress in their children and

do what they can ahead of time to prevent it. Parents can also help their children to manage stress by talking things over, thinking things through, relaxing, and helping children build a strong network of caring friends.

For more information about stress and stress management, see the EDIS series on [Stress](#)

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## Teen Dating

Adults tend to react with alarm when they hear preteens' or early teenagers' (between the ages of 10 and 14) claims of having a boyfriend or girlfriend. This concern is warranted. Being romantically involved as a preteen or early adolescent negatively affects academics (Brendgen et al., 2002), job performance, as well as behavioral competence in late adolescence (Neemann et al., 1995). Moreover, early romantic involvement is associated with depression and limited educational goals (Quatman et al., 2001). These same problems are not found, however, among late adolescents who become romantically involved. Well-established research in the past decade also shows a positive association between frequency of early dating or steady dating and sexual activity (Jones & White, 1990; Phinney et al., 1990). Recent research points to peer and family explanations for why early dating is

linked with current and later problems. These findings will be discussed later in this article.

It is well-noted that the interest in and desire for a romantic partner in adolescence is part of a natural, developmental process. Early adolescents tend to prefer the company of same-sexed peers but increasingly explore relationships with peers of the opposite sex (Brown, 1999). However, romantic involvement in late childhood and early adolescence may represent an unnatural attempt to accelerate development or, in other words, a child in a hurry to grow up. True romantic relationships should be based on intimacy. Erikson's theory of development is based on the idea that adolescence is a time of identity formation. Adolescents are only able to have meaningful, intimate relationships once they have well-formed identities. Therefore, romantic involvement during the formative stages of one's identity poses negative developmental consequences. Preteens and early teens' dating relationships are most likely characterized by *pseudointimacy*, in which partners' lack of self-understanding or identity translates into their inability to share intimacies in a relationship.

In addition to social/emotional explanations of adolescents' romantic interests, physical or biological influences are important. Preadolescents as early as age 8 are experiencing hormonal changes long before the physical changes of puberty occur. Adrenarche – or a time of activation in the adrenal cortex due to heightened levels of sex hormones – may influence a preteen's first romantic interest. Having a crush in the late elementary school and early middle school years is perfectly natural. However, cultivating a romantic relationship in these years, in other words, living according to one's biological development while ignoring social and emotional development, may explain negative outcomes of early dating. Indeed research supports that early maturing teens are more likely than late maturers to be involved in a romantic relationship (Haynie, 2003). A prominent adolescent researcher and theorist Terrie Moffitt (1993) proposed that a "maturity gap" exists among early adolescents who notice their physical similarity to adults is discrepant from the actual rights given them. Like other risk behaviors in adolescence, early romantic involvement may be an avenue to represent themselves as adults.

So when is the best time, age-wise and developmentally, to allow a teenager to date? A known Eriksonian scholar in child and adolescent development, David Elkind (2001), considers over 14 years as permissible for dating in his well-publicized work, *The Hurried Child*. A research study of over 300 7<sup>th</sup> graders found emotional and behavioral problems associated with having a romantic partner, but only among early teens that were unpopular with their same sexed peers (Brendgen et al., 2002). Does this mean that early adolescents who are popular with their peers should be allowed to date? Actually, no as the study also showed that having a romantic partner during the 7<sup>th</sup> grade was associated with poorer academic competence, regardless of their popularity with peers. To add, there is a noted link between early maturers, particularly females, being less popular with their same sexed peers, who are also among those teens more likely to be dating (Haynie, 2003).

Although peers have some influence in dating, parents and families strongly affect the outcomes of early dating. In a recent study it was found that early adolescent females who date were likely to have lower self-esteem when they came from families with high parental conflict whereas dating males from similar family backgrounds had higher self esteem than those who were not dating. Early adolescent, dating females who experienced strict parental authority were more likely to be depressed. Teen girls who had warm, strong relationships with their mothers and were *not* steady dating had higher grades. Surprisingly there were few adjustment differences between early adolescent males who were steadily dating and those who were not; in fact, those who were dating were slightly (but not significantly) higher in self-esteem and lower (not significantly) in depression (Doyle et al., 2003). These findings by no means support that a “double standard” should be used by parents, for example, allowing sons to date early but not daughters. When the sexes are combined, results of this study show poorer overall self-esteem and grades for early adolescents who date versus teens who are not romantically involved.

So the question that arises from the presentation of the research is; what should significant adults in the lives of preteens and teens do to discourage early dating? Here are some suggestions:

- Encourage open youth-adult communication about their romantic interests through the use of nonjudgmental, active listening. Don't try to embarrass a youth when he or she admits to an early crush or you find out about this crush inadvertently.
- Provide educational opportunities about emotional, social and biological changes in adolescence as well as open discussion about romantic relationships. Talking about romantic relationships in adolescence will not make teens more likely to date. In fact, most teens are bombarded by misleading images of relationships in the media. Dispelling relationship myths is the best way to help teens get a more realistic sense of what having a significant other means.
- Most important, provide educational opportunities and responsibilities that prepare youth for adulthood. When they are focused on their vocational and academic growth, they are less likely to focus on romantic relationships to fulfill needs for autonomy and adulthood.

#### **Suggestions especially for parents**

- Ensure that your relationship with your preteen or adolescent is warm and loving and that there are positive ways to handle family conflict set in place. Set firm rules and boundaries about dating and when and why you feel that particular age or time is appropriate. However, be flexible and listen to your teen's viewpoint and negotiate without giving up your parental authority. Being too strict may lead teens to rebel, date and experience depression and other problems.
- Encourage your adolescent to attend mix-sexed group activities without your direct supervision (however, adults should be present) such as a movie matinee, cultural / educational events, shopping at the mall, theme park visit, or outdoor activity.

**ADDENDUM: Facts on teens' dating: (based on a survey of 4,600 teens aged 12-17 in 2002 by a market research firm)**

- Over 1 in 10 teens are currently in a dating relationship that has lasted over a year
- Over half of teens report regular dating and about a third claim to have a steady boyfriend or girlfriend
- 38% of females claim to have a boyfriend and 83% consider marriage as one of their life goals\*
- 29% of males claim they have a girlfriend and 73% consider marriage as one of their life goals\*

\*The teenage male female discrepancy in having a romantic partner could be due to a number of factors: fantasizing on the part of females, embarrassment on the part of males, or age discrepancies among adolescent dating partners (e.g., a 16 year-old female dating an 18 year-old male).

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