Do you recall chasing lightning bugs with your cousins and enjoying a hayride in the country? Do you have an aunt that makes your favorite dessert when you go for a visit? Spending time together as a family develops strength among family members. These relationships develop bonds that are family treasures.

In today’s world families eat together less and less. When possible make mealtime a special occasion, a time anticipated by everyone in the family. Involve family members with tasks related to the meal. Turn off the television, put newspapers and cell phones away, remove all technology from the table and invite everyone to share interesting experiences, upcoming plans and events and news with each other. Encourage lingering at the table to enjoy relaxed, pleasant conversation.

A special event is anything you celebrate. Holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, firsts, beginnings, endings and “just because” are ideal times to plan a special celebration. Strong families look forward to these opportunities.

Try the team approach to yard work. With everyone’s help, a beautiful yard is half the work and twice the fun. Spend the time you save enjoying the wonderful outdoors. Go for walks, plant a fall garden, collect leaves, ride bikes. The combination of time together, a pleasant atmosphere, rigorous exercise and tranquil relaxation makes for wonderful memories.

Seldom does time spent watching television together count as quality time. Set limits on the amount of time your family watches television and plays computer games. Instead play educational games together. Talk, listen and really get to know each other. Read together. Providing children with opportunities for reading aloud greatly improves reading skills, kindles imagination and inspires creativity. Always let your interest in your child’s life show.

On the radio, on the TV, in the newspapers, through the mail—you hear the same claims about bad credit not affecting your buying power. Have you often wondered how this could be true? It isn’t true and it can’t be true.

The companies making these claims are nationwide and daily appeal to consumers with a poor credit history. They promise that your credit report can be cleaned up so you can make the big purchases—buy a car, get a home mortgage, get insurance or a job. They will ask for hundreds or maybe even thousands of dollars in fees for something they cannot deliver.

Legally, there are certain things that must be in place before you receive aid for credit repair. You must be given a copy of the “Consumer Credit File Rights under State and Federal Law” and a written contract that spells out your rights and obligations before you sign the contract. By law, they cannot make false claims about their services, charge you until they have completed the promised services or perform any services until they have your signature on a written contract and have completed a 3-day waiting period. During the 3-day waiting period, you can cancel the contract without paying fees.

The contract you sign must specify the payment terms of the services (including the cost), a detailed description of the services to be rendered, how long it will take to accomplish the promised results, any guarantees offered, and the company’s name and business address.

If you have lost money to credit repair scams, don’t be too embarrassed to report it. Laws are in place to protect you. Contact the local consumer affairs office or your state Attorney General. Check you phone directory for a phone number or check online at www.naag.org for a list of state Attorney Generals.

Be on the alert. It may sound like a good deal if you are in need of credit repair. But these companies do nothing to improve your credit report and most of them will simply vanish with your money.
Making Home a Safe Place for Children  
By: Andrea Scarrow, Colquitt County

Children’s bodies are growing and developing; their organs and immune systems are not fully equipped to fight off harmful chemicals and other dangers. Parents must take precautions to make the home environment a safe place for children. Exposure to harmful gases or lead might cause health problems for a child. One out of every forty children in the United States has too much lead in his or her body. The risks are greater for those living in cities.

Most problems with lead come from old paint or lead dust. Laws have been passed to ban the use of lead in household paint, gasoline, and water pipes. However, many older homes still have lead in them. Lead paint was banned in 1978, so homes built before then are likely to have lead paint as well as lead in the water pipes. Lead pipes are dull gray and scratch easily with a key or penny. If you are concerned that lead may be present in your home, speak with your local health department, and they can tell you how to test your home and water for lead.

If you suspect that your child has been exposed to lead, it only takes a small blood sample to test for lead poisoning. Ask your pediatrician or health care provider about this simple procedure. Remember to wash children’s hands and faces often with soap and water. Never let them chew or put their mouths on windowsills. Keeping a clean house reduces dust and dirt that could harm your child.

Carbon monoxide is a harmful gas that at high levels can cause loss of consciousness, coma and even death. Sources of carbon monoxide include gas appliances, wood-burning fireplaces, gas and charcoal grills, vehicles, and tobacco smoke. Signs of low-level carbon monoxide poisoning may include: headache, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, confusion, tiredness, weakness, sleepiness, tightness in the chest, trouble breathing, and changes in sight, smell, hearing and taste.

Make sure that your home is equipped with carbon monoxide alarms. Provide good ventilation for all heating appliances; never use charcoal grills or run engines inside your home or garage for even a short time, and never warm up your vehicle inside the garage. Have a heating contractor check your furnace, chimneys, and other sources of carbon monoxide every fall to make sure everything is okay.

Do all that you can to keep your home safe for everyone. If someone should show signs of carbon monoxide poisoning: get outside right away; call 9-1-1 and seek medical help, and do not return home until all problems have been found and fixed.

Food Safety for Hotdog Fans!  
Rachel Hubbard, Lanier County

Weekends during the fall mean outdoor events like tailgating and fall festivals. These activities usually include a traditional favorite, hotdogs. Whether it’s a camping trip, wiener roast, or grilling out at a sporting event, remember the same rules of food safety apply for hotdogs as with all perishable food items.

When purchasing hotdogs, there may be several types of dates on the package label. The “sell by” date tells the store how long the hotdogs can be displayed for sale. Be sure to buy hotdogs before the date expires. The “use-by” date is the last date recommended for use while the hotdogs are at peak quality. The “best if used by date” helps consumers know a precise date for peak quality or flavor of the hotdogs. The “expiration date” is to inform shoppers the last day the hotdogs should be used.

Once purchased, make sure the hotdogs are immediately placed in a cooler or refrigerator at 40°F or below. If there is no product date, the hotdogs can be safely stored unopened for two weeks at 40°F or below, and one week at 40°F or below once the package has been opened. For best quality, store hotdogs in the freezer no longer than one to two months.

Certain bacteria grow well at refrigerated temperatures and may occur in certain ready to eat foods such as hotdogs. These bacteria can cause foodborne illness. Although all hotdogs are fully cooked, they should always be reheated as a precautionary measure to prevent foodborne illness. Use a food thermometer to make sure hotdogs reach an internal temperature of 165°F or cook until steamy hot throughout. Then, don’t cross-contaminate! Wash hands, surfaces, and utensils after handling packaged hotdogs. Keep the packaged hotdogs and juices separate from other foods, utensils, and food preparation and serving surfaces. And, as with all perishable foods, never leave hotdogs at room temperature for more than two hours.

Refrigerate or place leftover hotdogs in a cooler at 40°F or below, and when in doubt, throw them out!

Follow the food safety rules when you serve hotdogs this fall. Don’t let foodborne illness spoil your fun. Pay attention to dates on packages when purchasing hotdogs, store hotdogs at safe refrigerator or freezer temperatures, and serve hotdogs steamy hot with clean hands and utensils.

MAKING HOME A SAFE PLACE FOR CHILDREN  
By: Andrea Scarrow, Colquitt County
Do you get concerned when your child refuses to eat vegetables or any green food? Has your child ever wanted to eat the same food meal after meal? Does your child get upset when one food touches another? Most children go through stages of being picky eaters. Usually this phase doesn’t last long. There are several ways to handle the picky eater. Certain techniques can encourage the most finicky eater to try new nutritious foods even if they are just tiny bites. Try these tips…

- Offer a variety of healthful foods to your child, and they will learn to eat them.
- Instead of asking your child if they want to try a new food, place it on their plate, cup or hand.
- Be patient. They may want to just look at it, touch it or smell it first.
- Try only one new food at a time. Use this time to teach your child about sweet and sour. Tell them what to expect from the taste of the food.
- Having your child sit beside a friend or sibling that likes the new food may help.
- Let your child decide how much of the new food to eat. Let them know that just a taste is fine.
- It is fine if your child doesn’t eat the new food at first. Try again at another meal.
- Sometimes a preschooler may say “no” at first but offer it to them several times.
- Serve new foods with familiar ones.
- Give the child foods that they can easily recognize.
- The “no foods touching” issue is an easy one to fix, so help them out with this one.
- Many kids like bright colors and shapes.
- Try to have at least one food the whole family enjoys and encourage the child to eat the food the rest of the family eats. Don’t make a habit of cooking special items just for your child.
- Forcing your child to clean their plate can sometimes lead to overeating.
- There are many new cool books out about eating new foods. Read books about foods with your child to encourage eating new healthy items. Include your child in grocery shopping and meal preparation. Many times children will eat foods they have had a hand in. Make sure that you are a good role model for your child. If you want them to eat their veggies make sure they see you eating them too. Enjoy meal time with your family. Turn off the TV and have meaningful conversations that involve everyone. Have healthy snacks always on hand and in clear view. Remember to relax, be patient, and enjoy this time in your child’s life.

10 Easy Snacks for Kids

By: Sylvia Davis, Baker / Mitchell Counties

1. Parfait: Layer vanilla yogurt and mandarin oranges or blueberries in a tall glass. Top with a sprinkle of granola.
2. Mini Pizza: Toast an English muffin, drizzle with pizza sauce and sprinkle with low-fat mozzarella cheese.
3. Sandwich Cut-Outs: Make a sandwich on whole grain bread. Cut out your favorite shape using a big cookie cutter. Eat the fun shape and the edges, too!
4. Peel a banana and dip it in yogurt. Roll in crushed cereal and freeze.
5. Spread celery sticks with peanut butter. Top with raisins.
6. Mix together ready-to-eat cereal, dried fruit and nuts in a sandwich bag for an on-the-go snack.
7. Smear a scoop of frozen yogurt on two graham crackers and add sliced banana to make a yummy sandwich.
10. Sprinkle grated Monterey Jack cheese over a corn tortilla; fold in half and microwave for twenty seconds. with salsa.
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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