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**Extension**  
Cooperative Extension  
Taylor County

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## Focus on Families

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### Vitamin D important for bone health, but other benefits unproven

Vitamin D's role in maintaining good health has been a frequent topic of discussion lately. Is it really the super supplement it's often made out to be?

Some recent studies show that vitamin D may have benefits far beyond its well-known role of working with calcium and other nutrients to strengthen bones and teeth. "The media has been quick to report the studies that show marvelous benefits for vitamin D," says Susan Nitzke, a nutrition specialist with the University of Wisconsin-Extension. "But studies that fail to show such benefits tend to go unnoticed."

The Institute of Medicine, a group that sets national nutrient standards, has reviewed vitamin D research and revised its official Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs) for vitamin D. The new RDAs are somewhat higher than the previous values for some age groups, but not as high as many experts had predicted. The new RDAs state that North Americans should aim for an intake of 600 International Units (IUs) of vitamin D per day. People age 71 and older may need more--as much as 800 IUs per day.

The Institute of Medicine's new RDA report also states that many people are over-supplementing with vitamin D. "If you routinely use supplements with more than 4,000 IUs per day, there are potential risks," says Nitzke, who agrees with the Institute of Medicine's recommendation that most people can meet their needs for vitamin D by eating foods with vitamin D. Examples are fortified milk and milk products, fortified cereals, salmon and other fatty fish.

Limited amounts of vitamin D can be produced within the body. In Wisconsin, and other states where exposure to sunlight is limited in winter months, the production of vitamin D within the body is reduced. Vitamin D's formation in response to sun exposure is also reduced among older adults and African Americans and others with darkly pigmented skin.



## Using a Slow Cooker

### Safety and Cooking Recommendations

- Cooking time with a slow cooker is more flexible than with traditional methods, but over-cooking and burning are possible in a slow cooker, so test for doneness close to the time given in the recipe.
- Slow cooker recipes are designed to be cooked with the lid in place.
- Start with fresh or thawed meat—not frozen.
- Use small pieces of meat rather than large cuts. Cuts larger than 2 pounds should be cut in half.
- Cook meat on high for 1 hour and then turn the cooker to low. This allows the slow cooker to heat up faster and the heat to penetrate the meat and kill any bacteria.
- Use recipes that include a liquid.
- Do not delay starting time.
- Do not reheat foods in a slow cooker or crock pot.
- Size matters, so if a recipe calls for a 3-quart cooker and you have a 6-quart, reduce the cooking time by 1/3 and check for doneness as specified in the recipe.
- If your slow cooker has a removable insert, you can assemble the ingredients in the insert the night before and refrigerate the whole thing. The next morning, set the insert in the slow cooker and turn on the heat.
- Check the food's internal temperature to make sure it reaches 160°F.
- Newer models cook hotter, so check the instruction manual for cooking times.

#### Check Slow Cooker Temperature

- Fill cooker with 2 quarts of water
- Heat the cooker on low for 8 hours
- Quickly check the water temperature
- The temperature should be 185°F. Higher or lower temperatures will affect doneness, and lower temperatures can cause food safety risks.

#### Cooking Time Conversions

Oven	Slow Cooker
15-30 minutes	High: 1½-2½ hours Low: 4-6 hours
35-45 minutes	High: 2-3 hours Low: 6-8 hours
50 minutes to 3 hours	High: 4-5 hours Low: 8-10 hours

Adapted from *Using a Slow Cooker*, Joey Peutz and Rhea Lanting, UI Extension Educators.



## Choose the Right Containers – and Location - When Storing Food at Home

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It is OK to store leftovers in a container that once held whipped topping? Can you reheat foods in carry-out Styrofoam containers? We know that milk should be refrigerated, but what about an open bottle of salad dressing? Follow these tips for choosing the correct containers – and location – when storing food at home.

### **Choose the Right Food Storage Container**

- **Use only food-grade containers for storing food.** Food-grade containers are those containers manufactured especially to hold food, like Ziploc bags or Tupperware containers. Do not use non-food grade containers like plastic or paper shopping bags or plastic trash bags to store food. Chemicals or dyes from these bags can leach into the food and contaminate it.
- **Do not re-use food containers that are hard to clean or may contaminate stored items.** Some food containers are hard to clean or have hard-to-clean lids; plastic water bottles and yogurt containers are good examples. Even though these containers originally held food (or water), they are hard to clean and should not be re-used. Other single-use items that should not be reused are disposable plastic utensils, plates and cups, Styrofoam trays or take-out containers, and plastic containers from cottage cheese, sour cream, chip dip, whipped topping, margarine and milk.
- **Use single-use wooden items only once.** Some wooden food-related items, such as popsicle sticks and shish kabob skewers, are intended for one-time use. If you want to reuse shish kabob sticks, buy the metal ones. Rather than reuse popsicle sticks, purchase one of the containers for making popsicles that comes with reusable handles. Or, use a new purchased popsicle stick every time.
- **Take care when choosing containers for reheating.** Numerous research studies have shown that using the wrong type of container when heating food in a microwave oven can transfer harmful chemicals into the food. Choose glass or microwave-safe plastic containers, or white paper plates for microwave heating. Do not reuse plastic food containers from margarine, cottage cheese, or similar foods for microwave heating. Do not use Styrofoam or take-out containers in a microwave oven. Some ceramic pottery dishes are microwave safe; check the bottom of bowls, cups and plates for information on safe heating in these dishes.

## Store Perishable Foods in the Refrigerator or Freezer

- **Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and dairy products** (milk, cheese, yogurt, etc) are perishable foods that spoil easily. These foods (raw or cooked) should be stored in the refrigerator. But don't expect the refrigerator to prevent spoilage altogether. For longer periods of time, meat, poultry, fish and most cheese can be wrapped in aluminum foil or placed in a freezer bag and stored in the freezer.
- **Most fruits and vegetables** will benefit from storage in the refrigerator. To help prevent foodborne illness, always store cut or sliced melons (watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew) in the refrigerator or on ice. A few fruits and vegetables - especially bananas, avocados, tomatoes, onions and sweet potatoes - will soften and turn brown if stored in the refrigerator, so store these at room temperature until you are ready to cook with them. Once cut, peeled, or cooked, store all fruits and vegetables in the refrigerator.
- **Store cooked or prepared foods in the refrigerator.** If you open a can of peaches, or prepare macaroni and cheese using a box mix, always store the leftovers in the refrigerator. Any leftover canned stew, baked beans, pasta meals, and other similar items should always be refrigerated.
- **Store opened bottles of dressings and sauces in the refrigerator, if recommended.** Check the label on opened bottles of salad dressing, ketchup, and similar items. If the label says 'Keep Refrigerated,' then follow package directions for both quality and safety.
- **Avoid storing food too long.** Some harmful bacteria can grow, even in the refrigerator. Periodically check dates on luncheon meats, hot dogs, and dairy products to make sure you are consuming these items before the 'Use By' date.
- If you are not sure how to store an unopened package or bottle, consider how the item was stored at the market. If you purchased the food item from the refrigerator case, or if it was stored on ice, there is a good chance that the food should be refrigerated once you get it home.

There are some excellent online resources to help guide your food storage decisions.

**Cupboard, Refrigerator, and Freezer Storage Charts** (Kansas State) found online at:

<http://www.oznet.k-state.edu/humannutrition/hrap/storage/stochart.htm>

**Storing Vegetables and Fruits at Home** (Washington State University) found online at:

<http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/eb1326/eb1326.pdf>

July 2007

Source: *foodsafety.wisc.edu*

# Step into Spring Cleaning

## Strategies for Cleaning Success

Did you ever think about how the spring-cleaning ritual developed? Before the advent of electricity and a host of other modern conveniences, homes were heated with coal, oil and/or wood, and lit by gas or candlelight. Soot and grime were the natural companions of winter. Once spring arrived, the doors were thrown open, and everything – rugs, furniture, cupboards, curtains and more – was aired out, cleaned out, swept out and scrubbed out.

Although today's centrally heated homes don't collect that intensity of dirt, somehow the winter dingies seem to creep inside. And this year, with challenging weather conditions keeping us indoors all too long, our instincts are to make everything look fresh and bright come that first whiff of spring. Nancy Bock, Vice President of Consumer Education at the American Cleaning Institute® has some recommendations to get you started.

### Strategy #1: Clear It Out

Start by getting rid of the things that are needlessly filling up your home.

- **Recycle it.** Even with the availability of reading online, some people still prefer the paper versions. Gather up any newspapers and those magazines no one has ever quite gotten around to reading. If your community also recycles mixed papers, check the regulations and then start a bin where you can toss those papers as you clean.
- **Sell it.** Garage sales, tag sales or consignment shops are a great way to get rid of items that are in excellent condition but that you no longer need. Collect them in one spot, and then, once spring cleaning is done, decide how to dispose of them.
- **Donate it.** Items that are in good condition but no longer fit your lifestyle can be donated to a charity or "freecycled" away. Freecycle is a grassroots, web-based, nonprofit movement of people who are giving and getting stuff for free in their own towns. Each local group is moderated by a volunteer, and membership is free. Visit [www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org) for more information.
- **Consumer convenience:** Smaller, lighter containers are easier to carry and store at home.

### Strategy #2: Inventory Your Supplies

Before you start cleaning, make sure you have all the necessary supplies on hand.

The basics should include an all-purpose spray cleaner (for small, washable areas), an all-purpose powder or liquid cleaner (for large washable surfaces like floors and walls), an abrasive cleanser (to remove heavy amounts of soil in small areas), a nonabrasive cleanser (for gentle cleaning on easily scratched surfaces, including porcelain sinks and ceramic tile), chlorine bleach (an effective disinfectant, particularly where mold and mildew are present), glass cleaner, furniture-dusting product (such as a spray and a clean cloth, or a microfiber cloth, mitt or duster) and toilet bowl cleaner.



You may also need to add cleaners specific to your surfaces, such as metal polishes and granite cleaners, or your personal preferences, such as wipes and special-purpose sprays. And don't forget to check your supply of vacuum cleaner bags and trash bags.

*Continued on Page 6*

### Strategy #3: Make a Plan

- **Decide on your cleaning style.** Some people find it more effective to clean one room at a time. Others prefer to group tasks – such as cleaning windows in several rooms at once or leaving all the vacuuming until the end.
- **Prioritize.** If one room at a time is your style, decide on the order. Generally, it's best to do the rooms that need the most work or get the most traffic first. That way, if your cleaning plans get derailed, you can still be proud of what you've accomplished.
- **Consider the big stuff.** Do the curtains need to be laundered? What about comforters, blankets, bed skirts, slipcovers and shower curtains? Are your area rugs and draperies due for professional cleaning? Once these items are removed from the room and on their way to getting cleaned, it will be easier to tackle the rest of the space.

### Strategy #4: Recruit Help

It's not necessary to do everything yourself.

- **Enlist family members.** Establish a Spring Cleaning Day. Start early. Assign tasks according to age and ability. Have lunch preplanned – maybe even delivered – so your helpers don't lose momentum. And make it fun. Hide some favorite treats in places that need to be cleaned. Play lively music that keeps everyone's energy up.
- **Pair up with a friend.** If you live alone or family members can't help, find a like-minded friend and clean together – your house in the morning, his/hers in the afternoon. If needed, schedule a second day.
- **Call in the professionals.** If your budget allows, you don't have to do every bit of cleaning yourself. Someone else can come in and wash the windows ... or buff the floors ... or shampoo the carpets ... or clean the upholstery ... or even do the majority of the cleaning after you've removed the clutter.

Source: American Cleaning Institute, *Cleaning Matters*, March/April 2011

## MANAGING YOUR MONEY

**Mondays, May 2, 9, & 16, 2011\***

**1:00—3:00 or 6:00—8:00 PM**

**Ground Floor Conference Room  
Courthouse—Medford**



***Develop your personal spending plan and learn how to keep track of your spending. \*This is a 3-part series.***

**Call the UW-Extension office, at 715-748-3327, before the first class in the series to pre-register. Class size is limited.**

**There is *no fee* to attend this program.**

University of Wisconsin, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Wisconsin counties cooperating. An EEO/AA employer, University of Wisconsin-Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title IX and ADA requirements. If you need an accommodation for a disability to fully participate in this program, please contact UW-Extension, Taylor County at 715-748-3327 or 711 for Wisconsin Relay. Please allow sufficient time to arrange the accommodation.

Hospice Foundation of America  
18<sup>th</sup> Annual National *Living With Grief*<sup>®</sup> Program

**LIVING WITH GRIEF<sup>®</sup>:  
SPIRITUALITY AND END-OF-LIFE CARE**

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 13, 2011**

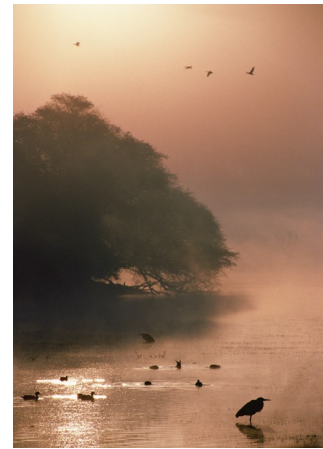
**12:30—3:30 PM**

**USDA SERVICE CENTER**

**UW-EXTENSION MEETING ROOM NO. 1**

**925 DONALD STREET**

**MEDFORD, WISCONSIN 54451**



This year HFA's 18th Annual National Bereavement Program focuses on "Spirituality and End-of-Life Care." The program will discuss differences between spirituality and religion, while also addressing spirituality during illness, death and grief; spiritual assessment and empowerment, and life review. Moderated by Frank Sesno, Director of the School of Media and Public Affairs at The George Washington University, the program will be broadcast via DVD, Wednesday, April 13, 2011 from 12:30—3:00 p.m. Immediately following the DVD broadcast, there will be a local discussion led by Teri Rostberg, Executive Director of Hope Hospice & Palliative Care, Inc., Medford and Rib Lake, Wisconsin.

**TO RESERVE A PLACE AT NO COST, CALL UW-EXTENSION  
AT 715-748-3327 OR 711 FOR WISCONSIN RELAY**

**Hosted in our community by:  
Hope Hospice & Palliative Care, Inc.  
UW-Extension—Taylor County**

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Participate in an educational program designed to support family caregivers.

**“Taking Care of You”  
Powerful Tools for Caregiving**

“Taking Care of You”...Powerful Tools for Caregiving is an educational program designed to provide family caregivers with skills to help them take good care of themselves. This 6-week series provides tools to help caregivers to:

- Build effective communication skills
- Reduce stress, anger, guilt and depression
- Learn relaxation techniques

A six-week series will be offered **Thursdays, May 5 through June 2 and Monday, June 6, 2011 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.** in the Medford Multipurpose Room, 845 E. Broadway, Medford, WI. The fee for all six classes is \$10, which includes The Caregiver Help Book. Free respite care is available.

**For more information or to register contact:**

**Diane Niggemann, Director  
Taylor County Commission on Aging  
845B East Broadway  
Medford, WI 54451  
715-748-1499**



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