Young Child

Chautauqua County's Magazine for Families with Young Children

Holidays With Blended Families

Winter Activites for Outdoors and In

Winter 2010
Issue #51 FREE

Contents

Winter 2010 Issue 51

Dear Reader,

My hope is that you all enjoy this holiday season with friends and family. Take time to teach your children about the importance of giving, gratitude and just being kind to others.

Stay healthy, safe and warm through the long winter months and as always, I hope you find our topics useful on your journey.

The next issue of the Young Child magazine will be distributed March 2011. If there are topics you would like to know more about or if you would like to contribute an article to this free local parenting magazine, please email your ideas and thoughts to loripollaro@yahoo.com.

Yours truly,

Lori Pollaro

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Parent Education Project

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The Young Child Magazine is published by the YWCA Parent Education Project in partnership with United Way Success By 6, and is free to parents, grandparents, caregivers, and anyone who cares about young children in Chautauqua County.

Holiday Blues

By Contance Ackerman LCSW-R
Psychiatric and Counseling Service for The Resource Center

Holidays are coming soon! A time for great fun, family, celebrations, parties, gifts, food and drink. Right? Don't we all look forward to the holidays? Not always. Holidays can lead to an increase in stress and stress-related symptoms for many of us. Some of us even experience the holiday blues.

What makes the holidays stressful?

- Financial limitations due to increased costs of everything, loss of a job, family additions
- Unexpected health problems in the family
- Grief over the death or loss of a loved one
- Overcrowded stores, inability to find the right gifts
- Moves into or out of a community and away from a support system
- Sad/hurtful memories of past holidays
- Trying to be sober or eat healthy at a time when parties and drinking is everywhere
- The expectation that holidays should be fun

What are the stress-related symptoms to be aware of at this time of year?

- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Tearfulness
- Irritability, explosiveness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Unusual health-related symptoms such as stomach upset, bowel problems, stiff muscles, ringing in the ears, dizziness, heart palpitations
- Social withdrawal
- Increased/decreased appetite
- Inability to laugh or enjoy life's activities

If you plan ahead to take care of yourself, holiday stress can be less intense.

What to do if you are experiencing some or all of these symptoms?

- Try to get adequate sleep
- Go for a walk or get to the gym to work out
- Try to eat nutritious but small meals/snacks four to five Times through the day
- Take a time out for yourself: take a quiet, hot bath, drink a cup of coffee/tea/water in a special cup, get some quiet time
- Learn some yoga exercises
- Watch a humorous movie
- Call a friend who you haven't talked with for a long time
- Volunteer some hours at the local soup kitchen, nursing home or SPCA
- Invite a child from a children's residence to come for dinner or the holiday
- Buy yourself a Christmas gift, wrap it and put it under the tree to open on Christmas day

What to do if a friend or loved one is suffering from holiday blues:

- Talk with him/her about your concerns
- Give that person a break: from cooking, cleaning, work or kids
- Just listen
- Get him/her to the gym or go for a walk
- Play a game of cards or do a puzzle

If you or someone you love exhibits the symptoms we mentioned for more than two weeks, contact the doctor or call for an appointment with a counselor.

Holidays can be stressful, but if you plan ahead with ways to take care of yourself, the stress can be less intense. Remember that this is the best holiday to start a new tradition or create a new memory.

Happy Hopeful Holidays

By Holly Murphy,
Regional Director for Chautauqua County, Achievement Center

This time of year is special for many people. Many of the world's largest religions celebrate the passage of events in their faith during this time of year. Small children enjoy learning about the differences between different holidays, and each holiday can enrich this season for your family.

Hanukkah/Chanukkah

This Jewish holiday starts at the end of November or the beginning of December, Another name for the holiday is the Festival of Lights. This festival celebrates the triumph of the ancient Jews over oppression and the miracle of oil that followed in the temple that had been rebuilt. The temple after the war had only enough pure oil to burn for one night, however, the lights kept burning throughout eight days. This celebration can remind us of the joys of religious freedom.

Yule

Celebrated between the 21 and 23 of December, this celebration falls on the shortest day of the year. Pagans celebrate this holiday to acknowledge that the sunlight and longer days are returning in the manifestation of the goddess and the death of the holly king. The holly king presides over the last half of the year, whereas the oak king presides on the half of the year when the day is the longest. These kings battle yearly for the right to rule the skies while the goddess grows from Yule until the spring. The renewal of the year and the sunlight can be manifested in taking time to renew our bonds with friends, family and ourselves.

Christmas

Christmas is celebrated by Christians. Their savior, Christ, was born in Bethlehem to a virgin. Christmas is on December 25th every year, not moving differently like Hanukah. This holiday celebrates the promise of God's love and redemption which came in the form of his child. Think about how love can transform the relationships in your family and community.

Kwanzaa

This holiday is celebrated from December 26th to Jan 2nd every year. It was established in the 1960s by Dr. Karenga. It was designed to celebrate the positive characteristics of the African American culture. One of the traits of Kwanzaa is self determination this characteristic can be applied to your family as you create goals and a plan on how to reach them.

Three King's Day/ Twelfth Night

Another name for this holiday is Twelfth Night, and the Latino culture takes time to celebrate this holiday, which falls on Jan 6th. It commemorates the wise men (or kings) who visit to Christ 12 days after his birth. This day is celebrated with special cakes and large family gatherings. This family and community holiday offers a chance for us to help support the community either through the riches of our time or donations.

As your children grow, it is an easy way to teach the benefits of other cultures by celebrating aspects of different holidays. The values that can be found in these holidays can be shared by all groups. Try one out this season and see the holidays recapture hope.

Celebrating the Holidays as a Blended Family

By Irene E Wheeler, Seneca Nation Head Start Education Specialist

Resources: Scholastic Early Childhood today; Stepping Stones Counseling Center; Sam Quick, Ph.D;

In a blended family, at least one adult has a child or children from a former relationship. These children regularly visit or live with the couple. A blended family may be small, consisting of an adult couple and one child, or larger, perhaps consisting of her, his and their children. Blended families can also be referred to as 'Step Families'.

Custody arrangements may result in the parents building a family around full-time, shared, or weekend step-parenting.

Holidays, such as Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, or Christmas, may be challenging for blended families. Unresolved feelings, animosity, and mixed loyalties can sidetrack what should be a happy time. For the first few holiday seasons, many stepfamilies learn how not to celebrate. Tension levels grow, tempers flare, and holidays are disasters waiting to be over. For some parents and children it is the first time they are separated at an important time of the year. For others, new children come from the other side. The visitors get lots of attention while the residential kids are feeling left out or somewhat ignored.

However, with forethought and creativity, your blended family can enjoy pleasant and enriching holiday celebrations. If you are one of the growing numbers of blended families, consider these suggestions that may help you manage the challenges of the holiday season:

Be Flexible

- Who says your family has to celebrate a given holiday on its official date? Who says all members of your blended family need to be together on a particular holiday?
- Do your best to stay out of power struggles with former spouses and other family members about where the children will spend the holiday. If you adopt a flexible mindset, you'll discover many satisfactory ways to celebrate holidays. **For example, in your family you may decide to celebrate Thanksgiving on the following Sunday. In the short run, this may ease the stress on everyone. After doing this for a year or two, you will have a new tradition in your family.
- Creating new ways of celebrating encourages the growth of bonds between family members and creates pleasant memories that are not rooted in the more distant past.
- You cannot please all of the people, all of the time. Giving in to unrealistic or provocative requests of children that upset the other children or your new partner will cause resentment. **Use the cardinal rule of "Couple Strength": the couple makes decisions together and makes them stick.

Encourage Expression of Feelings

Let youngsters, grandparents, and others share their feelings. Listen sensitively without interrupting or trying to fix problems they share with you.

You may not agree with everything a person says (and you certainly will not be able to accommodate everyone's preferences), but family members will appreciate your listening to them and taking their needs into account.

- Allow time and space for the child whose biological parent is not present to express sadness, regret, or guilt. Sometimes a child will feel disloyal to the absent parent. Acknowledging such emotions helps the child move through these feelings rather than getting stuck in them.
- Reassure the child who will not be with you that he will be missed, but that you will be all right. Give him permission to enjoy himself with the parent he visits. If you have conflicting emotions, confide in a caring adult rather than your child.

Plan Ahead

- Discuss options and plan in advance of a given holiday. Encourage family members to share their ideas, as it helps everyone voice their opinions and avoid unrealistic expectations. Deciding how to celebrate the holidays may not be easy, but planning in advance can help you bypass problems. **Particularly when young children are involved, it is nice to anticipate the holidays without the stress of last-minute planning. Remember, keep the plans simple.

Sidestep Competition

- In blended families, step parents, former spouses, grandparents, and other adults may compete for the time, favor and attention of children in the family. Sometimes children, taking their cues from adults, compete for the favor of others, too.
- This competitiveness, while subtle, damages family well-being and promotes an unhealthy air of tension. Realize that the competitiveness is usually rooted in jealousy and feelings of personal inadequacy. Focus on being the best person you can be. Appreciate your positive qualities and those of your family. Enjoy yourselves. Sidestep feelings of jealousy and unhealthy competition.

Avoid Over-Commitment

- Three complete holiday meals in one day is too much for anyone's stomach! This example is just one way blended families may over-commit during a holiday.
- Doing less is better. Keep your celebrations manageable and enjoyable. End family get-togethers before fatigue sets in, and plan activities that leave everyone relaxed when they're over. If you share gifts, be thoughtful, fair, and creative, making sure you don't spend more than you can afford.

Rise Above Animosity

Make it a game to see if you can be calm and even-minded in challenging circumstances. Children in blended families are relieved and adjust best when the adults are at least pleasant to one another.

Children may not care all that much when, where, or how they celebrate a holiday. However, it is very important to them that the adults they love get along with each other. Look upon challenging relationships as a test of your creative ability, kindness and inner strength. When you focus on changing yourself rather than trying to change others, you set an invaluable example for children.

Enjoy Your Family's Uniqueness

- Expect your stepfamily to be very different from a first-marriage family. A blended family is no better or worse than any other family, but it is unique. Learn to appreciate the advantages of your family and the strengths of each person in it.
- Avoid blaming problems on the blended family. Kids will be kids and adults will occasionally be immature whether in a first-marriage family or a stepfamily. The idea of perfect families who celebrate perfect holidays is a myth. All families struggle, and it's through these difficulties that we grow in understanding.
- Appreciate your family as a training ground for love. Discuss what is right in your family, and express appreciation for one another. Do it until it becomes a habit.

Maintain a Sense of Humor

- All stepfamilies go through hard times. It is tempting to bring the heaviness of the past into the present. Sidestep this tendency.
- Focus on having fun, even if you must be a little outrageous. For youngsters and older folks, gloom disperses quickly when someone gets silly, breaks into a grin, or makes a funny comment. Especially during the holiday season, blended family members need permission to let the past stay in the past and to enjoy the present!

Stay Active With Your Children During the Winter Months

The season of winter where we live can be long! This is a time when some may feel cooped up and even depressed because of the weather and others just love the cold, snowy months! It is important to have fun activities to do all year round, and remember, it is also important to get your children outside even if it is cold and snowy.

Please be sure when you are outside during the winter months and/or during outside activities that you and your children are dressed appropriately for the weather. Layers are a must here during the winter season!

Here are some fun activities for you and your family. Enjoy your winter!

Outdoor Activities:

Snow Painting

What you will need:

- Spray bottles
- Paint or food coloring
- Water

What to do:

Fill up spray bottles with paint and mix in a little water to make it the consistency that it will spray out of the bottle. Use to paint the snow. (If using paint you may want to make sure the paint is washable for easy clean up on clothes, etc. Food coloring typically will stain).

Birdseed Snow Angel

What you will need:

- Various types of birdseed (like thistle, corn, sunflower and safflower)
- Cups
- Pine boughs

What to do:

This angel is easiest made by a team. One partner lies down to make a snow angel while the other partner stands by to help the maker get up without messing up the imprint.

After the imprint is formed, pour cups of birdseed into the angel, filling the head and body with bands of variously colored seed.

For a finishing touch, add pine boughs for the angel's spreading wings.

Powder Puff Football

What you will need:

- Two teams of 3 or more people
- Spray bottle filled with a mix of water and paint or food coloring (caution: food coloring will stain clothes).

What to do:

Use the colored water to mark the playing field in the snow. You will need a large rectangular area with a centerline.

How the game is played:

Te teams line up at opposite ends of the field (the "North and South poles") for a kickoff. Once someone on the receiving team catches the ball, he tries to move it back across the defense's goal line by running with it or passing it to a teammate. Play stops if the person with the ball is tagged by an opponent or slides out of bounds. The teams then face off again on the spot. After four tries, or a touchdown, the ball goes to the other team. The game ends when either team gets cold.

On a Roll

What to do:

Pair up for a contest in which the object is to finish with the biggest snowball. The contest ends when the teams can no longer roll their entries or when you run out of snow.

Jump Snow Hurdles

What to do:

Lightly pack a bunch of basketball-size snowballs and then use them to build a course of hurdles to jump over in a round of follow the leader.

Indoor Activities

Homemade Snow Dough

What you will need:

- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup water
- ½ cup salt
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- ½ teaspoon cream of tartar
- 2 tablespoons white tempera paint
- 1 tablespoon white or iridescent glitter

What to do:

Combine all of the ingredients in a medium-sized pan and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until the mixture holds together (about 5 minutes). Remove the pan from the heat.

Turn the play dough onto a waxed paper–lined counter to cool, about 15 minutes. Use your homemade play dough to create fun figures. It can be used over and over again. Store the cooled play dough in a ziplock bag in the refrigerator for up to two weeks.

Snowflake Window Clings

What you will need:

- Paper
- Pencil
- Cookie sheet
- Waxed paper
- Dimensional fabric paint (glittery if you'd like)

What to do:

Draw a snowflake template (small, compact designs work best). Lay the template face up on the cookie sheet and cover it with the waxed paper. Using a thin line of the fabric paint (approximately 1/8-inch wide), trace the snowflake design on the waxed paper as shown, making sure all of the paint lines connect. Let the window cling dry overnight. Then carefully peel it from the waxed paper and attach to windows.

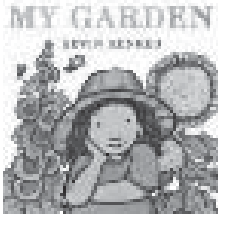
Books Make Great Gifts

By Valle Blair, Children's Librarian at the James Prendergast Library

The best gift you can give a young child is the gift of a good book! And the very best part of the gift is the reading aloud that naturally comes with it.

The US Department of Education says that the number one thing you can do for a child to help them be ready to learn to read is to read aloud to them. Children learn how language is supposed to sound and they learn new words when we read books aloud to them. Being exposed to as much language as possible in their early years fills a childs' brain with words so that when they begin learning to read, they already know many thousands of words. Reading aloud from good books introduces words and ideas that may not be a part of a child's everyday life. Reading with fluency and emphasis helps a child learn how words and thoughts fit together as well as make the experience a lot of fun!

So let's pick some great books for a child we care about this Christmas. Below are some of the newest picture books available. These books include great stories for every interest and wonderful illustrations to pour over and discover new things.



My Garden by Kevin Henkes (Greenwillow Books, 2010)
What would you plant if you could grow anything in the world?

Little Pink Pup by Johanna Kerby (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2010)
See what happens when the runt of a litter of pigs is adopted by a dachshund momma!

Dino-Baseball by Lisa Wheeler (Carolrhoda Books, 2010)
Mix dinosaurs and sports and you have a combination that can't miss! (Also check out Dino-Soccer and Dino-Hockey.)

Betsy Red Hoodie by Gail Carson Levine (HarperCollins Children's Books, 2010)
This is a neat, new variation on the old, old story.

Remembering Crystal by Sebastian Loth (North-South Books, 2010)
Has your child lost someone close to them? This is a charming book about loss and remembering.

Slow Down for Manatees by Jim Arnosky (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2010)
For those kids who are nature conscious, this is the newest from one of the best nature authors around.

Carmen Learns English by Judy Cox (Holiday House, 2010)
Have you ever been the new kid? Learn how Carmen adjusts to her new school and learns English as well as teaching her class Spanish.

Creak! Said the Bed by Phyllis Root (Candlewick Press, 2010)
What happens when the bed says, "Creak!" one too many times?

A New Year's Resolution Tradition

By Tess Kerzner LMSW LMHC
Children and Youth Services for The Resource Center

New Years is the oldest of all holidays. It was first observed in ancient Babylon about 4,000 years ago. The Babylonian New Year began with the first New Moon after the Vernal Equinox (first day of spring). For our modern day observance "New Year" comes on January 1- the start of the "new year" or new beginning. We all at some point make a pledge to lose weight, quit smoking, eat healthier, or some other avenue to improve our lives.

Most people will go out and celebrate with or without their family and/or loved ones. Let me suggest a new way of celebrating and embracing the New Year with your family members.

Start a new tradition with your family members by making a commitment to the New Year

Over three years ago, I received a beautiful red bowl as a gift. Inside this beautiful bowl were lovely, lacy cream-colored paper with a pen to write with, and 10 red ribbon ties. It was New Year's Eve and like other couples, we had a New Year's Eve dinner with 3 other couples to celebrate the incoming New Year. We called this group "The Supper Club". At the end of our wonderful evening of great food and drink, I brought out the cardinal dish and gave each person present one piece of the pretty paper and one ribbon. I asked that each of them write down a New Year's Resolution, curl the paper up like a scroll and tie it with the ribbon. We then placed the scroll in the dish and I placed the dish high upon the fireplace mantle.

We did not share what we wrote on the piece of paper but worked all year at keeping our pledges. The following year, we had the same gathering with the same people. Right before the New Year was to begin, we opened our scrolls and each of us read our goals out loud to each other to comment on if we did in fact keep to those promises made the year prior. We all entered into a grand conversation, some laughter, and solace. I still have these wonderful mementos and share them each New Year.

I share this story with you because I believe you can start a new tradition with your family members by each making a commitment to the New Year and keep them year after year (along with making new pledges each year). One does not need to have a fancy red vessel like mine, but I am sure that everyone has a keepsake bowl to make a pledge how they can do something different for themselves or a family member. Family members can help the young ones write down the changes they wish to work on. The fun part is coming back to the pledges placed in the dish the night of the next New Year Eve. Some pledges may be funny, some may be serious, some may not have been kept, and some promises perhaps were met. It will be great fun to keep, read and reread these scribes each year as the years go by.

One more thing, make a special dinner with each family member making a contribution to the meal. Round out the evening with some hot chocolate as they think about what they want to pledge for the New Year.

In the early 1700's the Scottish poet Robert Burns wrote tune called "Auld Lang Syne" that is always sung at the New Year. "Auld Lang Syne" literally means "old long ago," or simply, "the good old days". Embrace these moments with your family members.

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And auld lang syne!

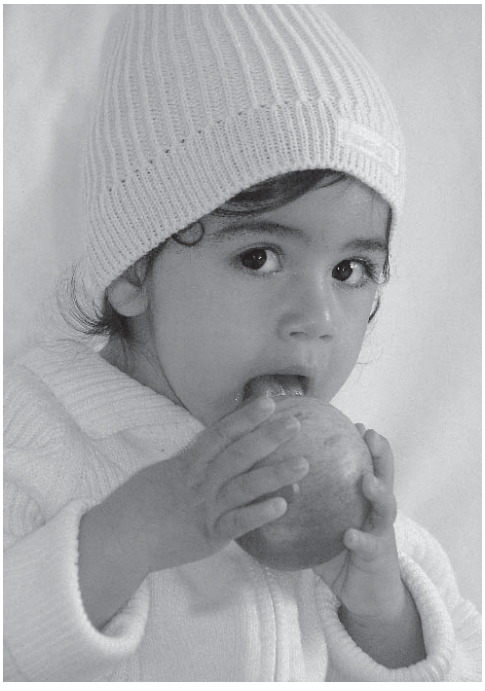
Chorus.-For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne.
We'll take a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne."

Healthy Snacks

By Patty Hammond, Cornell Cooperative Extension Family and Consumer Science Issue Leader

Providing healthy snacks for preschoolers is important. Young children can be fussy eaters and they can only eat so much food in one sitting, so it's hard to be sure they'll get all the nutrients they need if they eat only three meals a day.

When you are planning snacks for children, focus first on adding more vegetables and fruits to their diets. Vegetables like carrots or zucchini, when cut into very thin sticks (matchsticks); bell pepper rings; sliced cherry tomatoes; avocadoes; steamed broccoli, green beans, or sugar snap peas all make great tasting snacks. Good fruit snack choices include small pieces of apple, banana, pineapple, kiwi, peach, mango, nectarine, or melon; strawberry halves or other berries; and tangerine sections. Remember, most fruits contain a lot of natural sugars, so don't overdo it.



You also have to use caution when you are serving some raw vegetables and fruits to young children because they can be choking hazards. For instance, grapes and dried fruits like apricots can be good snacks if you're careful when preparing them and are watchful while children are eating them to prevent choking. Just be sure to cut them small enough and stay with your child while they eat them. Also, make sure your child sits down to eat. Don't let children run, walk, play, or lie down while eating. Foods that can cause choking are often round and approximately the size of the child's throat, or about the size of a nickel. Either avoid these foods or cut them into small pieces of no larger than one-half inch.

Always try to balance what you serve so children get foods from all the important food groups during the day. When you are selecting snacks from the grain group, strive to serve whole grain foods. Some ideas include dry cereal (avoid sugary cereals by reading your nutrition facts labels!), whole grain crackers, mini rice cakes, sliced whole grain bread, mini bagels, graham crackers, or whole wheat tortillas.

Compliment your vegetable, fruit and grain snacks with dairy products like low-fat cheese slices or string cheese; mini yogurt cups; fat-free or low-fat milk; low-fat cottage cheese and with protein foods like egg slices or wedges, peanut butter, hummus (bean dip), small pieces of lean turkey or chicken, and shelled pumpkin seeds. Again, always be mindful of choking hazards.

You can also serve your child a small portion of leftovers if you followed food safety precautions and are sure they were refrigerated promptly after dinner.

Children will get the greatest benefit when you make snacks that include two or more food groups. For instance, you can serve apple slices with peanut butter or make a mini pizza by placing a slice of tomato and a slice of cheese on half of a whole wheat English muffin.

Snack preparation doesn't have to be difficult or time consuming and it can become a fun learning experience if you include your children in snack preparation activities. They're also more likely to be excited about eating their snacks if they have contributed to putting a simple recipe together. Don't forget, children also love to decorate or dip foods, so whenever possible give them a small variety of foods and let them be creative and have fun while eating their snacks.

It isn't hard to build healthy snacks into your daily meal plan. Planning, preparing and eating them can be a lot of fun for both you and your child.

You can also create your own customized MyPyramid Plan for your preschooler that will take out some of the guess work by showing what and exactly how much your child needs from each food group. You'll find more tools at: *http://www.mypyramid.gov/preschoolers/HealthyHabits/samples.html*

Mini Veggie Pizza

Ingredients:

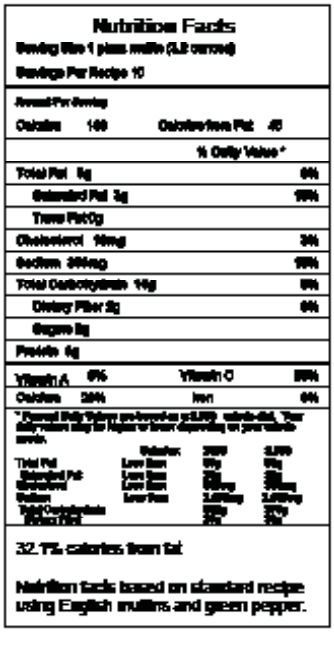
5 English muffins (or bagels)
1 small zucchini
1 green or red pepper
8-ounce package part-skim mozzarella cheese
8-ounce can of tomato sauce
1/2 teaspoon dry oregano

Directions:

1. Slice English muffins in half. Place them on a baking sheet, and toast lightly in oven or toaster oven.
2. Wash zucchini and bell pepper. Grate zucchini. Chop pepper into small pieces.
3. Grate mozzarella cheese.
4. Top each muffin half with 1 tablespoon of tomato sauce. Add grated zucchini, chopped pepper, and grated cheese. Sprinkle with oregano.
5. Broil in oven until cheese is melted (about 2 minutes).

Yields about 10 servings

Source: Sisters in Health: A Nutrition Program for Women. Division of Nutritional Sciences, Cornell University and Cornell Cooperative Extension, 1999. Recipe adapted from Susan Kessler, Healthy Heart Snack Choices Resource Guide (Plainview, NY: Cornell Cooperative Extension of Nassau County, 1995)


Nutrition Facts

Nutrition facts based on standard recipe using English muffins and green pepper.

Cornell University
Cooperative Extension

Home Energy Assistance Program

By Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc.

The HEAP program is designated to assist income eligible customers with financial assistance for heating utility costs with a benefit amount based on household size, composition and income.

Services are provided to customers who heat with gas, electricity, oil, propane, kerosene, or wood, for the following needs: non-emergency assistance, emergency assistance to prevent shut-off, and assistance to reinstate utility or fuel service.

To apply, call Call Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. to speak with a HEAP Scheduler, who will set up an agreeable appointment date. Once an appointment is scheduled, an application packet can be picked up at one of COI's locations, mailed to the customer, or picked up and completed 15 minutes before your appointment. A list of all the required documentation is reviewed during the appointment, and is included in the application packet. For the appointment, bring copies of all of the required documentation. Any missing documents will result in pending your application and denial of a HEAP benefit, if not submitted within 10 days. If you cannot make your scheduled appointment you must call and ask to be rescheduled prior to the scheduled time. No-shows without a phone call will be moved to the end of the list of appointment requests.

Income guidelines 2010-2011:

Persons in Household	Monthly income
1	$2,129
2	$2,784
3	$3,439
4	$4,094
5	$4,749
6	$5,404
7	$5,527
8	$5,650
9	$5,773
10	$5,896
11	$6,029

Contact the HEAP Scheduler at:

Laughlin Community Action Center
402 Chandler Street, Jamestown
(716) 338-9800

or

Connections North
10825 Bennett Road, Dunkirk
(716) 363-6420

Protecting That Winning Smile

By Mark Goshgarian, Media Consultant, The Resource Center

Here's something to chew on: Dental decay, commonly known as a cavity, is the most common chronic illness among American children. About 59 percent of children between the ages of 5 and 17 have dental decay, as compared to asthma, which affects 11 percent of kids in that age group.

"It's a major problem," said Kelly Davis, Registered Dental Hygienist with The Resource Center's Dental Clinic in Dunkirk. "It's heartbreaking for me to see children's teeth so rotten and in such poor condition."

An estimated 51 million school hours per year are lost in the United States because of dental-related illness. To help curb that, New York State law now requires public schools to ask for a dental health certificate for children at the time of entry into kindergarten, second, fourth, seventh and 10th grades, declaring the child's dental health condition.

"We need to hold parents accountable for their kid's dental needs and educate them as well," said Kelly. "It is the parents' responsibility to get their child seen every six months on a regular basis, just as they would do with their pediatrician."

While the Centers for Disease Control recommend an oral health assessment for children between the ages of 1 and 2, some local experts recommend a child make their first visit to the dentist around age three.

Until then, parents can start introducing the concept of what going to the dentist is like, in an effort to make the child feel more comfortable and relaxed when they get there. They can also go out and buy the child's first toothbrush in preparation for learning good oral hygiene. The following is an easy to read, simple to follow, common sense reference guide of what children can expect to encounter and the various stages of care they'll receive at the dentist, as well as what they should be doing at home, in between their visits.

Children Ages 3 - 4

At the Dentist

- Introductory visit
- Cleaning

At Home

- Work to reinforce cleaning and brushing

Children Ages 5 - 6

At the Dentist

- Cavity detection X-rays
- Fluoride treatment
- Cleaning
- Sealants on first permanent molars, called "6-year molars." Sealants are thin, plastic coatings painted on the chewing surfaces of the back teeth.

  "If parents get sealants on their kids teeth, kids will avoid getting a cavity," said Kelly.

  A sealant normally costs between $30 and $40 per tooth. Medicaid will cover the cost of the sealant, as will most insurance companies, but only until age 14. Sealants can last up to 10 years but really should be checked every six months and replaced every three.

At Home

- Brush twice a day for two minutes
- Introduce flossing

Children Ages 7 - 11

At the Dentist

- Cavity detection X-rays
- Fluoride treatment every six months
- Cleaning/Flossing

At Home

- Brush twice a day for two minutes
- Floss
- Fluoride drops (if needed and recommended)

Children at this age are in what's called "mixed detention," which means they have a mix of baby and adult teeth, so it's important to take care of both.

Children Ages 12 - 17

At The Dentist

- Cavity detection X-rays
- Fluoride treatments
- Cleaning/Flossing
- Sealants on second permanent molars, called "12-year molars"

At Home

- Brush twice a day for two minutes
- Floss regularly
- Avoid sugary drinks

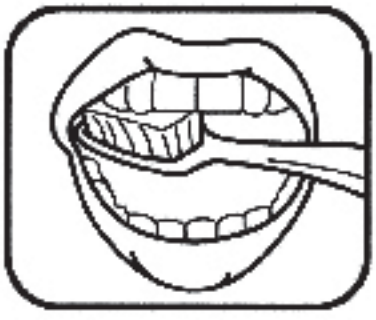
"The worst possible thing for children to drink is soda. The refined sugars combined with the acids eat away the tooth structure," said Kelly, "Juice is also bad; it is all sugar, and even milk breaks down into sugar and causes tooth decay. The best thing to drink is water."

If the recommendations are not followed, gum infections such as gingivitis can also occur in children as early as age 10. So, to help protect that winning smile, brush and floss daily, visit the dentist every six months and limit sugar intake. As with anything, a little prevention at an early age can eliminate significant and costly oral health problems in the future.

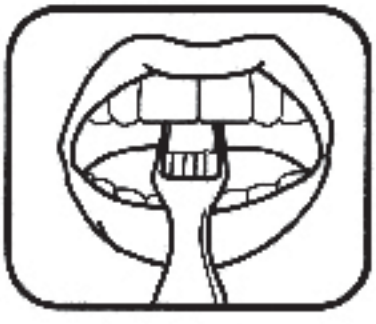
February is National Children's Dental Health Month

How to Brush

Place the toothbrush at a 45-degree angle to the gums. Move the brush back and forth gently in short strokes.



Brush the outer surfaces, the inside surfaces and the chewing surfaces of all teeth.



To clean the inside surface of the front teeth, tilt the brush vertically and make several up-and-down strokes.

Brush your tongue to remove bacteria and keep your breath fresh.

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Coloring Sheet

A HEALTHY SMILE IS PRETTY AS A PICTURE!

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