



In Touch, In Tune

www.extension.purdue.edu/dearborn



March 2025

Dear Friends,

March welcomes spring. We have been reminded what winter can be in Indiana, so we are ready for spring. I spoke to two teens that experienced winter for the first time. They shared how they are ready for spring. I am keeping an eye out for the signs of spring, such as crocus and daffodils. I am also planning my garden and landscaping wishes.

I hope that you will plan activities from the March Living Well calendar to further your wellbeing and your family's and friend's wellbeing.

Warm Regards,
Marcia Parcell
Extension Educator, Health and Human Sciences

DATES TO REMEMBER

- March 22 Celebrates *As Young As You Are Day* and *National Goof Off Day*.
- April 4 Register for Get WalkIN'
- April 18 Good Friday, Extension Office closed

Food, Fun & Conversation

1 2 3 4 weeks to better family dinners

Family dinner! We all know it's a good thing. It's the perfect time to bond with your family, promote healthy eating and unwind with a delicious meal. But with the craziness of daily life, cooking dinner can feel overwhelming. That's where we come in. With our online dinner program, *Food, Fun and Conversation: 4 Weeks to Better Family Dinners*, you can make family dinners a household staple in just four weeks.

This free guide includes healthy recipes, dinner activities and loads of conversation starters. We'll even email you helpful tips and reminders! By the end of the month, you'll be planning more meals, cooking healthier food and enjoying more quality time with your family. And that's what it's all about, right?

Interested? Sign up at: <https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/register/?signup=4wpand> and begin your dinner journey tonight! and begin your dinner journey tonight!

I just want to try Food, Fun and Conversation without signing up »: <https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/4week-program/introduction/>

Source: <https://thefamilydinnerproject.org>

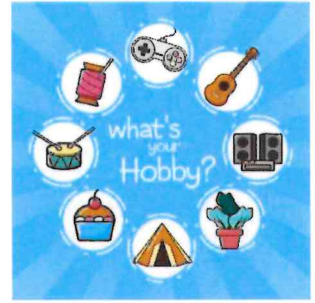
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MARCH 22 CELEBRATES AS YOUNG AS YOU FEEL DAY AND NATIONAL GOOF OFF DAY

In searching for as young as you feel, I came across, “How Hobbies Improve Mental Health.” Seeing the health benefits of hobbies, can ensure you age with ease or discover a younger side of you. The tips to make time for hobbies might enable you to goof off more than just March 22nd.

What hobby are you considering?



HOW HOBBIES IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health can be impacted by many different things, from life-changing events to everyday tasks. And while there are many strategies we can actively engage in to improve our mental health, an often-overlooked factor is spending time on an activity that you enjoy – otherwise known as a hobby.

What “counts” as a hobby?

A hobby can be any activity done regularly during spare or leisure time for pleasure. Whether you do something creative, athletic, academic, or something more individualized, what really matters is that it is something you find meaningful and enjoyable. Hobbies can range from spending quiet time alone, visiting or eating with others, communing with nature, playing sports, and even vacationing. When we dedicate time to voluntarily engage in pleasurable activities, research shows our mental health can flourish.

Some mental health benefits of hobbies:

- **Reduced stress:** participating in activities during leisure or spare time has been shown to reduce stress levels. For instance, one study showed approximately 75% of participants’ cortisol levels (one of the most widely studied hormonal markers of stress) were lowered after making art. Don’t consider yourself to be an artistic person? That’s okay! This study also showed that prior experience wasn’t needed to reduce stress.
- **Enhanced well-being:** a study in New Zealand found that engaging in creative activities can lead to an improved sense of wellbeing that may have long lasting effects. Participants felt a higher positive affect or mood and a sense of flourishing after days where they engaged in a creative activity.
- **Improved social connection, decreases in depression and anxiety:** while there are many mental health benefits related to hobbies on your own, group or ‘team’ hobbies have also been shown to provide important opportunities for social connection, friendship and support. Research also shows that adults who regularly participate in some kind of team sport are less likely to experience symptoms of depression, anxiety, or stress.
- **Improved mental health:** hobbies that include physical activity have been linked to many health benefits including reduced stress, reduced blood pressure, and a lower heart rate. But if you take physical activity outside, there are many additional positive benefits. Experts agree that spending as little as 10 minutes in nature can lead to improved mood, focus, and overall wellbeing.

Tips to make time for hobbies:

A common barrier that seems to make it difficult to do the things we love is TIME. When it comes to how our lives are typically structured, work tends to come before play. And although many of us feel like there isn’t enough time in the day for hobbies, there are changes we can make to help find and spend free time doing the things we love:

1. Rather than trying to find ‘hobby time’ every day, try thinking of time in weeks to discover extra time hidden in your schedule. Dedicate a few hours for something you enjoy each week. Still struggling to find time for fun? Take a step back and say ‘no’ (or delegate) to lighten your load and make space for hobbies.
2. There are many times during the day we may find ourselves in autopilot mode. It’s easy to lose track of time doing mindless things like checking social media or watching television. Tune in to how you’re spending down time, whether it’s in the morning or evening, and consider how you might use that time to indulge in something you enjoy.
3. More and more research supports taking ‘micro breaks’ during the work day to increase overall productivity. Take advantage of these short breaks throughout the day to do something that brings you joy, like taking a walk outside, listening to your favorite podcast or music, reading a chapter or two of a good book, or visiting with others.

Source: <https://extension.usu.edu/mentalhealth/articles/how-hobbies-improve-mental-health>

BUDGETING FOR INFLATION

Inflation affects prices of pretty much everything. From gas and groceries to clothing and heating, higher prices can create financial challenges for families. As you sit down to budget and pay bills, it's a good time to fully review how household dollars are being spent.

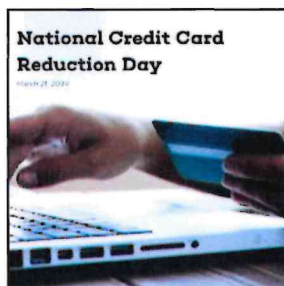
1. Many of the tried-and-true cost savings methods still work. Assess how much you are spending now and on what. This will help you make important choices between your wants and needs. You'll want to take a good, honest look at what you are spending when and where.
2. Track food and grocery spending. Save your receipts -- from both the grocery store and restaurants where you eat out. You also may be able to find this information on your bank account and credit card records. Some store apps keep itemized records of what you spend. Don't forget to include the extras. Did you stop at the coffee shop or convenience store this week? What about that last minute take-out meal on a busy evening? Most of us spend more than we think we do. When you start to see where you are spending, on what items, and the cost of those items, you may find you can make a few changes quickly. Then really think about your wants and needs. These are different for everyone. Have a conversation with the other decision-makers in your family and see where you might cut back."
3. Many of us know it is a good idea to eat at home, but did you know that eating at home can be healthier and save money? Making a grocery list is a terrific cost-saving measure. And when you plan out your meals ahead of time, you are more likely to avoid eating out and provide more balanced, healthier meals.
4. Research sales. Many stores rotate the same items on sale every few weeks or in time for certain holidays. If you can, start to track how often something like eggs or butter go on sale, then you can anticipate when to buy them at lower prices. Many stores offer additional digital savings. Check the app before you go to the store. Sign up for coupons or discounts can add up. Look for traditional coupons in the paper, mail and at the checkout register.
5. Shop from the outside of the store in. In the grocery store, this is where you'll find fresh food. Get the items you need first, then go through the aisles. Skip the aisles that will tempt you -- those aisles that have items you "want," but don't need. Avoid items at the end of the aisle. These items are designed to stimulate impulse buying and the prices are not always cheaper.
6. Convenience foods that are packaged and processed for longer shelf life are located in the aisles. These can cost more for less food. Use your calculator and compare pricing. It may be less costly to buy a box of pasta and a can of pasta sauce than individually packaged microwaveable packets."
7. Consider buying the store brands instead of name brands. Some of these items have the exact are made exactly the same or have the same content/ingredients, and come from the same suppliers, but with different packaging. They often offer substantial savings.

Source: <https://extension.wvu.edu/youth-family/finances/budgeting-for-inflation>

March 21st is Credit Card Reduction Day

Credit Card Reduction Day, aims to assist people with substantial credit card debt to eliminate their interest payments quickly. It serves as a reminder that credit card usage requires caution, as credit card transactions do not reflect immediate deductions from bank balances and can cause individuals to lose track of their spending.

Source: Purdue Extension



MARCH 26 IS SPINACH DAY

GROWING SPINACH, A COOL-SEASON VEGETABLE



Spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*) is a vitamin-rich, delicious, leafy green that is best grown in the cool weather of either spring or fall. The many varieties of spinach include smooth-leaf, savoy or curly leaf, arrowhead, and savory. It can be eaten raw or cooked. Spinach stores well in the refrigerator or can be blanched and frozen for later use. Spinach is versatile in the kitchen and packs a powerhouse of nutrients: iron; potassium; magnesium; vitamins A, B6, B9, C and E; and lutein.

Select a variety of spinach for growing and a garden area for planting. For best results, use fresh seeds as the germination rate for this crop deteriorates quickly. Always check the seed packet for specific varietal recommendations. A raised bed with good drainage is perfect for growing an early spring crop since the soil warms quickly and can be worked following just a few warm days. Spinach likes full sun but will tolerate partial shade. Prepare the planting bed by amending the soil with rich compost or aged manure. Mini-till or spade the ground and level it off with a rake. Mature spinach has a long taproot, so loosen the soil to between 12 and 18 inches. Sow the seeds ½ inch deep two inches apart, in rows 12 to 18 inches apart. If you are following intensive gardening plans, such as Mel Bartholomew's square foot gardening, plant 9 seeds per square foot. Make sure the soil is moist. You can grow spinach in a container, but choose varieties specifically suited to it, a container large enough for it, and a nutrient-rich soilless potting mix.

One key to successfully growing spinach is to plant the seeds when soil temperatures are cool. Spinach seeds germinate best in a soil temperature of 45°F to 68°F. Recommendations are to plant spinach about four to eight weeks before your average last frost date in the spring and six to eight weeks before the average first frost date in the fall. Two crops per year can be achieved! Many home gardeners have become discouraged growing spinach because they start too late in the spring. Understanding the relationship of spinach to temperature is critical to achieving success.

When planting in early spring, shelter the seeds with a clear polypropylene cover over the raised bed for the first few weeks. A framework over the bed keeps the plastic from direct contact with the spinach and prevents stem damage if snow, rain or ice builds up on the plastic cover. The plastic cover serves as a greenhouse, encouraging leaf growth on those early spring days.

Within 7 to 10 days, the first signs of sprouting usually appear as the cotyledon (seed leaves) emerge. During light rainy days, remove the plastic cover for a good soaking. Keep the cover on until the weather warms. Optimum growing temperature is 50°F to 60°F, but young seedlings can tolerate temperatures as low as 15°F to 20°F. Try to keep the soil consistently moist because spinach will bolt if the soil dries out. When spinach bolts, it sends up a strong central stem to produce seed, and it becomes bitter and inedible. When you must supplement with irrigation, water the soil, not the plant leaves. Moisture on the leaves can encourage fungal diseases.

Thin out the plants as they reach two inches in height. Spinach plants need four to six inches of space to develop properly. Again, check the seed packet for specific varietal recommendations. Failure to thin out seedlings can result in stunted growth and premature bolting. Better spacing also decreases the plant's susceptibility to disease and pests. Roots are shallow at this stage, so be careful when thinning. Gently pull out all weeds when they are small so as not to disturb the spinach roots. Aphids and leaf miners are typical pests and removing weeds can help control the population.

Mulching the young plants will help keep the soil moist and cool and will also discourage weeds.

As daylight increases and temperatures warm to 70°F, cover with a shade cloth. This floating row cover will help cool the soil as well as control insects.

Begin harvesting the spinach leaves when they reach a nice size. Leaves can become bitter and lose quality if left on the stem too long. Simply snip off the outer leaves at their base, leaving the main stem or rosette intact for further growth.

Once the days warm up and the temperature reaches the 80°F, spinach will want to bolt. Therefore, with a spring planting, this plant's productive life usually stops by the end of May. Spinach is also day-length sensitive. It will bolt in June even if the temperatures are cool. Pull out the plants and add them to your compost pile. Amend the soil with compost and reuse the bed for the next warm-season vegetable crop, such as beans or peppers.

For a fall crop, use the same season-extending methods as described above – only in reverse. Shade cloth can keep the soil cool during the early warmer days of fall. Plastic covers can keep the growing area warm enough to be able to harvest a crop into late fall or, with luck, early winter.

By understanding the growing requirements of spinach, you can be successful with two abundant crops each year. Enjoy your fresh picked, crisp leaf spinach in salads and cooked dishes.

Source: <https://extension.psu.edu/growing-spinach-a-cool-season-vegetable>

INTERNATIONAL WAFFLE DAY IS MARCH 25

I am sharing this Power Pancake and Waffles recipe to meal prep and/or have them for breakfast.

POWER PANCAKES AND WAFFLES

These protein-packed pancakes or waffles are great for meal prep. You can easily double or triple the recipe to have a quick breakfast anytime. For extras, cool the pancakes or waffles to room temperature, lay them on a sheet pan in an even layer, and freeze overnight. Then store them in an airtight container in the freezer. To reheat, simply place them in a toaster, toaster oven, air fryer, or microwave until warm.

2 eggs	2 teaspoons baking powder
3/4 cup low-fat cottage cheese or nonfat Greek yogurt	1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/2 cup old-fashioned oats	Optional add-ins: berries, banana, dark chocolate chips
2 tablespoons pure maple syrup or honey (<i>Omit if using a flavored yogurt.</i>)	

Skillet:

In a small blender or food processor, blend all ingredients until smooth.— *If using Greek yogurt, you may want to just mix ingredients in a bowl until well combined.* Heat a skillet over medium heat. Lightly spray with cooking spray. Add 1/4 cup of batter to the skillet. Add optional berries, banana slices, or dark chocolate chips. Cook for about 4 minutes per side or until each side is golden brown.

Mini Pancake or Waffle Maker :

In a small blender or food processor, blend all ingredients until smooth.— *If using Greek yogurt, you may want to just mix ingredients in a bowl until well combined.* Preheat mini pancake or waffle maker according to product manual. Once heated, lightly spray with cooking spray. Add 1/4 cup of batter to the center of the mini pancake or waffle maker. Add optional berries, banana slices, or dark chocolate chips. Cook for about 4–5 minutes or until you can lift the lid and the pancake or waffle releases.

Source: <https://medinsteadofmeds.com/power-pancakes-and-waffles/>

Laughs for March

- Why is everyone so tired on April 1? Because they've just finished a long, 31 day March.
- Why are oak trees so forgiving? Every March they "turn over a new leaf".
- What March flowers grow on faces? Tulips
- Why is March the most popular month to use a trampoline? It's spring-time.
- What goes up when March rain comes down? An umbrella.
- Sometimes February feels like it will last forever...But time Marches on.



LIVING WELL calendar

31 Ways to Live Well during
Living Well Month



MARCH 2025

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

PURDUE UNIVERSITY®

Extension - Dearborn County

2

Practice being still for 5 minutes today (Try out some breathing exercises)

3

Explore ways to save for your future, whether it be a piggy bank, savings account, or other investment

9

Write down 5 blessings or things you are grateful for

10

Do 10 body-weight squats and 10 jumping jacks

11

Do some research to learn about a culture that is different than yours

12

Be aware of your feelings. Express them to people you trust

13

Reach out to someone you care about. Make a date to get together

14

Be well at work - Set goals for your career and start taking steps to achieve them

15

Be a role model for those around you. Let them see you making healthy choices and encourage them to do the same

16

Explore public events in your community and discover ways to get involved

17

Find a book to read and read 1 chapter today

18

Forgive someone who has wronged you

19

Practice and say out loud 5 positive affirmations (ex. I am strong, I am brave, I am smart, I am loved, etc.)

20

Declutter, donate, and recycle things you don't need or use anymore

21

Find an opportunity to appreciate nature today

22

Nurture your spiritual wellness. Ask yourself what values are most important to you

23

Do 10 pushups (or modified pushups) and 10 sit-ups today

24

Take a mental health break at work and go for a walk outside or in the hallways

25

Instead of watching a 30 min show tonight, listen to a 30 min educational podcast or watch a Ted Talk

26

Get outside and soak up some vitamin D. Find a park or trail and take a walk

27

Make a budget for April. If needed, talk to a financial advisor to get started

28

Have a plant-based meal today

29

Schedule any doctors visits, exams, or check ups that you have been putting off

30

Bring a homemade lunch to work today rather than buying fast food

31

Have dinner with your family, friend, or neighbor with no smart devices

3

Take 5 minutes to do some flexibility exercises

4

Try a new vegetable today or try a familiar vegetable in a new way

5

Swap one sugar sweetened drink for water

6

Give 3 compliments today

7

Volunteer one hour of your time to help someone else (ex. moving furniture, cooking, cleaning, etc.)

