

In Times Of Pressure, Turn To Family, Friends For Support

NEWARK, Del. — Farmers who manage stress well have good support networks. In times of trouble, they can turn to people they know and trust — their families, church members, friends or other farmers who have experienced similar pressures — for emotional support.

This is one of the most important strategies for managing stress, says Dr. Patricia Tanner Nelson, extension family specialist at the University of Delaware. Regular, informal get-togethers with family members and friends can be a lifesaver.

Families experiencing severe financial stress often withdraw from church and community activities because they are embarrassed and pressed for time. But this is when you need your church and friends the most, Nelson says. Staying in touch with the people helps you see options. It reinforces your sense of self-worth, the confidence that you have what it takes to weather the storm. This is important, since one

effect of stress is paranoia — the feeling that everyone is against you and that you're trapped in a situation without choices.

"If you believe that great American families are built by rugged individualists who keep to themselves, you may have difficulty accepting the importance of a strong support network," Nelson says. "But you need to realize that the key to a workable support system is *reciprocity*. Not only do you accept encouragement and help from others, but you also respond to their needs. You help them and they help you."

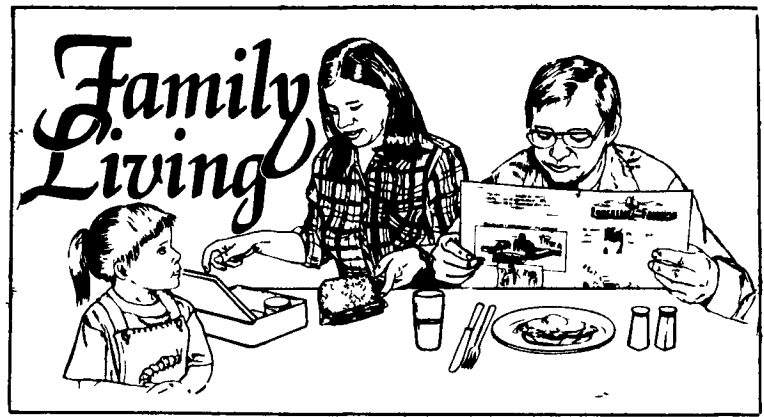
Dr. Hamilton I. McCubbin, a leading researcher on human stress, says people need two kinds of social support:

- Daily emotional support that tells them they're loved and cared for. Unfortunately, people have very short memories for this kind of support; they need fresh doses of compliments and I-love-you's each day.
- Esteem support that tells them they're valued for who they are

what they do. This is the kind that results from being elected to an important office or from being trusted enough to be given meaningful responsibilities.

The best social support network probably includes both friends and members of your extended family, Nelson says. Studies of single parents and the elderly suggest that people who rely only on help from within their families often feel more isolated and lonely than those whose social support network also include friends. "Families often specialize in meeting our physical needs — such as providing loans or food," Nelson says. "Friends seem to be best at meeting our social and emotional needs."

In a 10-year University of Michigan study of 3,000 people, it was found that those who had a minimum amount of social contact were four times as likely to die early those who has regular companionship. People really do need other people.



Couples who have developed helping relationships — each giving the other support, reassurance and a sense of personal worth — are better equipped than others to deal with the demands of daily life. They're also better prepared to function well in a crisis. "A supportive marriage can't prevent trouble," Nelson says, "but it can shield a family from the full emotional impact of social and

economic problems." When you realize you're under stress, share your feelings and perceptions with a close friend or spouse, the family specialist advises. Don't keep worry bottled up. Talk about the problem you're trying to solve with someone you trust. That person can help you keep it in perspective, and may also be able to help you think of possible solutions.

Help Children Develop Positive Self-Image

Parents sometimes say about their child: "Mary is too tall," or "Jimmy is too small for his age."

Children come in different sizes, so they are not "too tall" or "too small" in any absolute sense. They're just smaller or taller than the average we expect for a particular age. More important than size is whether the child feels loved and accepted just the way he is, according to Growing Up, a child development newsletter about school-age children.

Here are some ways to help a child develop a positive self-image about his own physical characteristics:

- Pay attention to how he feels about his physical self. Help him appreciate and accept himself for being the way he is. Perhaps you can point out someone in the family, school, community, or public life whom he admires who has similar physical characteristics (short or tall, stout or thin).

- Avoid nicknames — like Fatso, String Bean, Skyscraper, Squirt. Even as a joke, such teasing can be hurtful and harmful.

- If you hear someone else making fun of his size, help him deal with the situation by learning

to develop some quick responses ("Good things come in small packages!") Also point out the advantages of his size: small children can fit in tight places; tall children can reach things on the top shelf.

- Help your child be good at something that involves physical skills, such as running, skating, knitting, ping-pong. Encourage him, and practice with him. The child who is not big enough to try out for basketball may be a wizard on the soccer field. This goes for girls as well as boys.

- Treat your child according to his age in years, not according to his height or weight. Parents and teachers often "baby" a child who is small and expect wisdom beyond his years from a tall, mature-looking child.

- Make sure your child gets good nutrition and adequate rest. Growth spurts in children are often accompanied by fatigue. Regular and adequate sleeping hours are important so that the body has time to rest and regulate itself in preparation for another day of energy and activity.

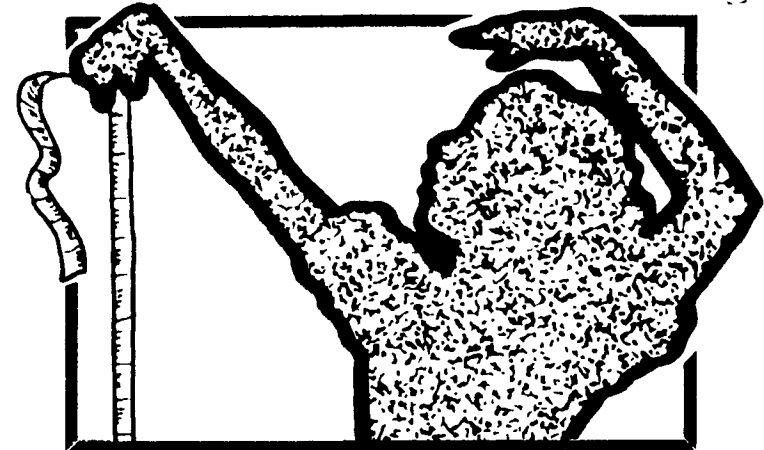


Illustration by [unreadable] Physical Development

Reduce Sugar, Increase Flavorings To Eliminate Excess Calories

NEWARK, Del. — For a snack or dessert, most people want something sweet such as pie, cake or cookies. But they pay for the sweetness they crave — in calories! In fact, every quarter cup of brown or white sugar adds close to 200 empty calories to recipes, according to Dr. Sue Snider, University of Delaware extension food and nutrition specialist. Snider offers several hints to help cut down on added sugar in recipes.

"Use one-third less sugar than the recipe calls for in pies, puddings or fruit crisps," she advises. Also, use flavorings that intensify the sweetness in foods such as cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, allspice, ginger, cardamom, anise, fennel, mint, vanilla and almond extract.

When baking, choose fully ripe fruits; their natural sugar content will sweeten desserts. By using well-ripened pears, bananas and some types of apples in recipes, less sugar may be needed.

Frosting is another area where

calories can pile up quickly, Snider says. A lot of sugar — and fat — can be eliminated by sifting confectioner's sugar onto baked goods instead of frosting them.

Experimenting with low-calorie sweeteners can cut sugar content also. Two low-calorie sweeteners — aspartame and saccharin — are currently available.

Aspartame is sold under the trade name Equal. One packet of Equal has the sweetening power of two teaspoons of sugar, but a total of only four calories. Aspartame can successfully replace sugar in beverages, yogurt, whipped toppings and no-bake or frozen desserts. "Prolonged heat will decrease its sweetness, so add it to heated foods after they are cooked," advises the specialist. In general, sour or tart foods require less aspartame than the equivalent amount of sugar, but bitter foods like chocolate may require more.

Saccharin is even sweeter than aspartame and by itself provides no calories. It can be purchased in dry or liquid form and the number

of calories depends on the ingredients added to the product. "Saccharin can be added to cold or heated foods," Snider says, "But many people object to its bitter aftertaste."

She says that neither saccharin nor aspartame can totally substitute for sugar in cakes, cookies or quick breads because an extremely poor quality product will result. For these foods it may be best to use recipes that have been specially formulated for use with a sugar substitute. "Cut out a small amount of sugar — up to one-fourth of what the recipe calls for — rather than substituting an artificial sweetener," she says.

In some recipes, such as those for jams and jellies, the sugar content can't be reduced or eliminated. While special jelling agents are available which allow jelly-makers to either reduce or eliminate the sugar in fruit spreads, jams and jellies made with regular pectins, or made without any pectins, require a certain amount of sugar to form a gel.



BACK HOME

By Michelle S. Rodgers

Berks Extension
Home Economist

Editor's Note: Back Home columnist Michelle Rodgers will be leaving her post as Berks County home economist temporarily to pursue a master's degree in rural sociology and family studies. Because of her return to school, Michelle will take time off from writing her column and devote her full attention to her studies. The family living page, which is published every other week, will also be discontinued.

Homework

September! Classes, bus rides, new shoes, football, soccer, and hockey games, routine changes, books, and homework! Ah...remember homework? I think the worst part of homework for me was carrying all those books in our long farm lane, the actual studying part I enjoyed!

Regardless of how you felt about homework in your school days, what is important is your attitude now. Homework has been identified in almost all national and state reports on education as a vital factor in increasing student achievement. And one special element of homework is you! Yes, you, as a parent are an important part of homework. When your child has homework, the teacher is not there to supervise. You are. If you have a positive attitude toward homework, then the odds are your child will, too.

Cooperation and communication between the home and school are essential if home assignments are to make a significant contribution to your child's education. The time you share together with your child on these assignments can be beneficial to you both. I remember that my parents gladly proof read my math problems, read through papers, correct spelling, and helped to gather information for reports.

There are ways that you, too, can be a help and make homework less of a headache!

- Review schoolwork with your child and sign homework assignment sheets.

- Cut down on TV time and turn off the radio while your child is studying.

- Provide an area for your child to study that is away from the

center of activity in your home.

- Set aside a regular study time, and help your child organize assignments.

- Be aware of homework assignments and talk to teachers to make sure the work is being done.

- Read at the same time your child is studying — sort of a "study hour" for the whole family.

- Provide educational trips to libraries, museums, and local sites if possible.

- Ask your children questions about what they have learned. One family has each family member share one new thing at the evening meal.

- Set a limit on extracurricular activities if they interfere with studying time. Help your child control the urge to "be in everything." In our family, we played in one sport. That allowed other seasons for other kinds of interests like music and drama.

- Support your children while they're doing homework by checking in every now and then to see how things are going and being available to help if they need it.

It's a good idea to implement some of the above ideas right from the first day of school. It's probably a good idea to discuss the topic of homework even before school begins. By presenting your expectations, you may eliminate the nagging that happens later on!

Speaking of homework, I'll have some of my own this year. I, too, am returning to school to complete my master's degree in rural sociology and family studies at Penn State University. So in order that I get my homework done, I'll be leaving Lancaster Farming and "Back Home" for a while. May we all broaden our skills and knowledge in the next school year!