Basic Home Maintenance Course

Does your home need minor repairs and you can’t afford someone to come in and complete them? Are you wasting water because of a leaky faucet? Are you spending too much on utility bills? The Buncombe County Cooperative Extension Center is offering a five-series Basic Home Maintenance Course beginning Tuesday, September 2 from 5:30–7:30 pm. The remaining dates for the course are: September 4, 9, 11, and 16. Some of the topics to be covered are: saving on your heating and cooling bills, basic plumbing repairs, interior and exterior maintenance, landscaping and lawn care, indoor air quality, common household pest, etc. The fee of $20 includes all materials. Space is limited so pre-registration is necessary.

Parenting Matters: Parent Education Program. It’s not easy being a parent. In fact, parenting is probably the most challenging job most of us will ever have. Come to this 8 session, hands-on creative learning program for parents who want to make a difference in their child’s life and improve their parent-child relationship. You will learn how to manage stress, improve your communication skills, avoid power struggles with your child, and build a support system to help you. The classes will meet on Tuesdays—August 19 through October 21—from 12:00 noon to 2:00 pm. A $10 registration fee covers materials; pre-registration is required. Call to inquire about evening classes.

New Weight Management Program: Eat Smart/Move More/Weigh Less. This new weight management program gives you practical skills to lose or maintain your weight in a healthy way. Even if we are able to maintain our weight, we may still want to plan for eating healthier and keep moving more. The class will meet on Mondays, 12:00-1:00 pm, September 8 through December 22. Plan to attend all sessions or as many you can. A $25 registration covers supplies, personal journal and magazine; pre-registration is required.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO REGISTER FOR ANY OF THESE CLASSES, CALL 828-255-5522. ALL ARE HELD AT THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY CENTER OF NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION, 94 COXE AVENUE, ASHEVILLE.
Holding a Budget Discussion

With family budgets becoming smaller and smaller and prices on everything going up, it may be time to have a family discussion about the household budget. Talking about money “later” or “some other time” just doesn’t seem to happen. It may be necessary to find a time on a regular basis when everyone involved can sit down and discuss financial matters and avoid unwanted arguments over money.

When you decide to have the discussion will depend on family schedules. Try to avoid meeting between 5:00 and 7:00 pm when people are usually tired and hungry. A good time to meet is right before payday or when your bills are due. Choose an area of the house where there will be a minimum of distractions like the TV, phone or kids.

Including all family members in the discussion can be a learning experience for children. Everyone will be more likely to support the decisions that are made if they are included in the process.

10 Signs of Debt Problems

If any of the statements below are occurring, you may have debt problems.

1. More than 20% - $1 out of every $5 – of your paycheck goes to pay off car loans and credit cards.
2. You are borrowing to pay off other debts.
3. You do not know how much money you owe.
4. You make only the minimum payments shown on each bill.
5. You miss payments, or you pay your bills late.
6. Creditors telephone you or come to your house.
7. People or stores refuse to give you credit.
8. You borrow from retirement accounts or use credit cards to pay normal monthly bills.
9. You write postdated checks – checks with dates later than the day you write them - or you bounce checks regularly.
10. You take an extra job to pay bills.

Source: National Endowment for Financial Education

Lowering the Summer Power Bill

Simple solutions such as improving your home’s insulation and more involved projects such as upgrading your HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) system can help reduce your home’s need for energy, and therefore your energy bill.

- Use the air conditioner only when necessary. If the breeze outside is pleasant, open a window.
- Use ceiling fans and other cooling fans to circulate air, but turn fans off when no one is in the room.
- Educate family members about energy conservation – keep doors and windows shut while the air conditioner is running.
- Schedule regular check-ups and maintenance for your heating/cooling units by a qualified heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) technician.
- Clean or replace unit filters every month.
- Keep air registers open, clean and free of furniture, carpeting, or drapes.
- Use a programmable thermostat. In the summer, set your thermostat to 78ºF, or your highest comfortable setting. For each degree you raise your thermostat, you can reduce your cooling costs by as much as 3-5%.
- Use kitchen and bathroom ventilation fans wisely – use them for short periods to circulate air as necessary. Running them for extended periods uses energy unnecessarily and allows cool air to escape outside.
- Use shade trees and other landscape features, awnings, and window coverings to keep the sun from overheating your home.
Fireworks! Picnics!

Summer is officially underway! Summer should be a time of unstructured schedules, fun and learning for the whole family. Think outside the box and try some new ideas and bring some old ones to life. For parents summertime can be both exciting and stressful, whether your children are home for the summer or you have youngsters coming to visit. The thoughts of finding activities to keep everyone busy can be daunting. Children depend on you to provide some interesting things to do and at the same time you want to maintain your personal sanity.

Physical activity is an important part of growth and development. Adults need at least 30 minutes a day and children 60 minutes for improved health. This activity doesn’t have to be hard or done all at one time. The benefits of activity for you and your child are many. Active families tend to have a more stable family atmosphere and sleep better. Set the example and have fun.

Safety is also important, especially for outdoor activities.

- Children should not swim or play near with water without adult supervision.
- Wear protective headgear and reflective colors.
- Wear proper clothing, sunscreen and a hat.
- Know your community; make sure the playground is safe for your family.
- Pay attention to weather related issues; drink plenty of water.

Who has not heard someone say “I’m bored”. Here are some ideas to beat boredom anytime of the year.

- Learn to skip a stone (1) Use good stones. Any rock will skip at least once, but smooth stones will skip more. (2) Grip the stone between the thumb and forefinger hooking your index finger around the edge. (3) Throw the stone sidearm, directing it both out and down. Release the stone with a snap of the wrist.
- Designate certain days as TV free days. Instead of watching TV, read, draw a picture, work a puzzle or take a walk.
- Have fun running through a sprinkler.
- Pick strawberries, blueberries or fresh vegetables.
- With soaring gas prices this will be a great summer to check out your own city and state as a family.
- Have a family garage sale. Clean out the clutter and spend the money on an outing.
- Learn about recycling. Mark bins accordingly and your family can do their part to protect the environment.
- Read a book together. Begin a good book and read together every night on the porch or under a shade tree.
- Plant a little garden. Your family can water it and pick the fruit or vegetables.
- Play hide and seek.
- Create something from recyclables.
- Play board games such as Scrabble, Trivial Pursuit or Candyland.
- Learn to whistle really loud. (1) Put your index fingers together to form a V-shape. (2) Stick both fingers into your mouth to the first knuckle, stretching your lips over your teeth a bit. (3) Use your fingers to hold the tip of your tongue near, but not touching, the roof of your mouth, as if pronouncing the letter “d.” (4) Begin blowing, and then blow some more. It may take a little time and practice to get the perfect whistle.
- Give activity gifts—give active games or sporting equipment as gifts to encourage activity.
- Make your own backyard your child’s favorite destination. Inexpensive inflatable pools are a great way to cool off.

Remember—having fun together helps your children form memories that will last a lifetime.
Buying Smart

There are many ways to spend money. With it not going as far as in the past, here are 25 ways to get the most out of each dollar.

1. Buy only the things you really need.
2. Save up the money to buy what you need. Do not take out a loan or use a credit card.
3. Shop at thrift stores, garage sales or flea markets. Negotiate prices.
4. Swap clothes with friends and relatives.
5. Avoid trendy clothes; buy “classic” styles made from high quality fabrics.
7. Carefully inspect everything before you buy; make sure the item is worth the money. Keep your receipts.
8. Buy--do not rent--furniture.
9. Make a shopping list and stick to it. Do not buy on a whim. Take only cash; do not take a credit card.
10. Shop for food at supermarkets or food warehouses; avoid costly convenience stores.
11. Use coupons, and buy store brands at the supermarket and drugstore.
12. Buy large quantities of things you use a lot.
13. Eat at home. Make your meals from scratch.
14. Take your lunches (“brown bag”) to work.
15. Share driving or use public transportation.
16. Shop around for the best price for car insurance every year.
17. Trade babysitting with neighbors, friends and relatives.
18. Go to the dollar movie or rent videos.
19. Write letters instead of calling long distance.
20. Give homemade gifts.
21. Read books, magazines, and newspapers at the library.
22. Do as much repair work as possible yourself.
23. Buy only “term” instead of “cash-value” life insurance.
24. Use a flexible spending account at work to pay for child care and medical expenses.
25. Buy only energy-efficient appliances. You will be paying for electricity, too.

Source: National Endowment for Financial Education

The Green Corner

To assist individuals (and households) in reducing their greenhouse gas emissions the US Environmental Protection Agency has developed tools for individual use. The online calculator will allow you to obtain an estimate of your personal greenhouse gas emissions or your family’s greenhouse gas emission. Check it out at:
http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/ind_calculator.html

Empty-Nest Syndrome

In August, many of us are faced with adjusting to a home void of teenagers. As our children graduate from high school, many move on to college or other life changes that take them out of our home. It can be good to prepare ourselves for the changes in our lives as our children’s lives are changing. Many of us will enjoy the change and discover that our relationships with our children grow to be more peer like. We can take pride in seeing our children gain their independence and accomplish goals. Still it is important to recognize that you may feel some sense of loss, sadness or even be overwhelmed. Make sure you (1) communicate with your child about issues that could arise since you are not in contact each day, (2) anticipate any difficulties that can arise like caring for older relatives, your retirement issues, or menopause, (3) seek support from friends and family and (4) focus on interests or goals you have been putting off because of family responsibilities and enjoy your new free time.
Getting Ready for the First Day of School

It is hard to believe that the first day of school will be upon us before we know it. It seems that it was just yesterday that the doors closed and the kids went yelling and cheering happily home for a summer full of fun. As you get ready for school this year, here are some tips to help you plan for a healthy year, keeping within a healthy spending plan as well. Take advantage of the Sales Tax Holiday which will be from Friday, August 1 through Sunday, August 3. Clothing, footwear, and school supplies of $100 or less per item; school instructional materials of $300 or less per item; sports and recreation equipment of $50 or less per item; computers of $3,500 or less per item; and computer supplies of $250 or less per item will be exempt. For more information, go to the North Carolina Department of Revenue page: [http://www.dor.state.nc.us/taxes/sales/salestax_holiday.html](http://www.dor.state.nc.us/taxes/sales/salestax_holiday.html).

As you are choosing what to buy, keep your child’s health in mind. You may want to plan to pack healthy lunches this year. Here are some affordable ideas that can take the place of prepackaged lunches which can be high in fat and extra calories from sugar or other sweeteners.

- Get a hard plastic container and pack your child their own cheese and crackers. You can also use peanut butter or other nut butters. Look for whole grain crackers such as whole wheat and reduced fat cheeses. This allows you to control the portions as well as the amount of extra calories.
- Thinly sliced lunch meats such as turkey breast, ham or roast beef are also good protein sources in sandwiches.
- Choose a small drink container. The metal types can be fun and allow you to fill their drinks with low fat milk, water or 100% juice instead of sweetened fruit flavored drinks. You can save money by not buying the individual containers.
- You can even get wide-mouthed thermos bottles to use to send hot lunches or leftovers from dinner.
- Look for the safer plastics for your containers, #2HDPE, #4LDPE and #5PP. These three types of plastic are the healthiest. They transmit no known chemicals into your food and they’re generally recyclable; #2 is very accepted by our recycling programs, but you are not able to recycle your #4 and #5 containers in Buncombe County.
- For dessert, send some fresh fruits like our local apples or make your own sweet cookies using whole grain flour.

You may also want to see if walking or riding a bike to school is an option for you. This can save gas as well as be a way of getting extra physical activity. This year remember that children don’t need everything they see or want. With costs rising it is okay to scale back on how much you buy them. Talk to them about the economy and how it affects the cost of their school clothes, food, and supplies. Use this time as a teaching moment to help them better prepare for their future. For more information on starting the new school year off in a healthy and cost saving way, call our office.

Arthritis and Exercise Benefits

Researchers found that those who exercise in a class benefit more from their exercise than those who just exercise at home with a video. They assigned 220 people to either a 12-week exercise class that met three times a week or to exercise at home with a video tape. They found that the group that went to the class reported the largest reductions in pain, fatigue and depression. They also showed more improvements in grip strength and walking speed. So, if you have arthritis, you may benefit more from joining others when you exercise and making it more structured.
Preserving Snap Beans and Italian Beans - Pieces, Green and Wax

Beans are coming in season and you may want to be putting some by for the winter months. The thing to remember is beans are a low acid food and if you are going to can them, you need to use a pressure canner. On average you need 14 pounds per canner load of 7 quarts. A bushel weighs 30 pounds and will yield about 12 to 20 quarts. Select filled but tender pods and remove any diseased or rusty pods. Wash your beans and trim ends. Leave them whole or cut or snap them into 1 inch pieces. Hot pack will produce a better quality product with less water loss, but you can raw pack them if you like. To hot pack: cover beans with boiling water; boil 5 minutes and fill jars loosely, add boiling water, leaving 1 inch headspace. To raw pack: fill jars tightly with raw beans, leaving 1 inch headspace and add boiling water to cover, leaving 1 inch headspace.

In the mountains you need to adjust the canner pressure and increase the pounds to 12 pound for altitudes of 2001 – 4000 ft and weighted canners to 15 pounds for altitudes above 1,000 ft. You can call our office if you live at other altitudes for your adjustments. Process quarts for 25 minutes and pints for 20 minutes.

If you don’t want to can your beans, you can always freeze them. Remember to blanch them first for 3 minutes before packing and putting in the freezer. For blanching times of other vegetables you can call our office or go to http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/publications/uga/uga_freeze_veg.pdf.

NJO/CH/SKC:gs Individuals with disabilities who would like to participate in any program mentioned in this newsletter but who need special assistance to do so, should call the Extension Center at 828-255-5522 at least five days prior to the event.

On the Home Front is a newsletter produced by the Family and Consumer Sciences Agents in Buncombe County. The purpose of this newsletter is to inform and educate Buncombe County residents on workshops and issues that affect them, and to provide ideas for helping improve their quality of life.

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Check out Buncombe County Center’s website at...http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu