

BHS A.S.S.I.S.T. E-NEWS

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Birds of a Feather: Obesity Spreads Through Social Networks

Nobody will argue that a cold is contagious. But obesity? Forget pandemic paranoia, there is a new kind of germ to watch out for: the social contagion. Research reported in *The New England Journal of Medicine’s* July 2007 issue traced obesity (measured by body mass index [BMI] over 30) through social networks. Here’s what they found.

The probability of becoming obese increased by:

- 37 percent if your spouse is obese
- 40 percent if your sibling is obese
- 57 percent if your friend is obese
- 71 percent if your friend of the same sex is obese



It Takes a Village

Don’t trash your “little black book” - you need friends! In fact, this research highlights how important the support of family and friends is. It also validates what most of us already know: it’s tough to lose weight ALONE.

How do friends influence weight gain? There are a number of possibilities. If someone you care about gains weight, you might become more accepting of weight gain not only in him or her but also in yourself.

Friends share beliefs, philosophies and habits, too. If those shared beliefs include overindulgence in unhealthy foods and under-involvement in physical activity, the shared pounds can accumulate quickly.

Social Antidote

What kind of inoculation could possibly work for an epidemic spread by friendship? The social antidote. Here are some tips:

- Take an honest look at your health, habits and weight. Then discuss them with friends and family. But keep it about you!

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Top Tax Time Tips From the IRS

This year, taxpayers will have until Monday, April 18 to file their 2010 tax returns and pay any tax due. Why? Emancipation Day, a holiday observed in the District of Columbia, falls on Friday, April 15 this year. But even though you have a couple of extra days, don't delay. Here are the Internal Revenue Service's top tips that will help your tax filing process:



\$ **Get it together.** Round up any documents or forms you will need when filing your taxes: last year's return, W-2s, 1099s, receipts, canceled checks and other documents that support income or deductions you are claiming on your return.

\$ **Use Free File.** Participating software companies make their products available through the IRS (some also support state tax returns). You can choose from brand-name tax software or online fillable forms. Visit www.irs.gov/freefile to review your options.

\$ **Try IRS e-file.** After 21 years, IRS e-file has become the safe, easy and most common way to file a tax return. If you owe taxes, you have payment options to file immediately and pay by the tax deadline. Best of all, combine e-file with direct deposit and you get your refund in as few as 10 days.

\$ **Consider other filing options.** There are many different options for filing your tax return. You can prepare it yourself or use a professional. You may be eligible for free face-to-face help at an IRS office or volunteer site. Give yourself time to weigh different options and find the one that best suits your needs.

\$ **Visit the IRS website again and again.** The official IRS website is a great place to find everything you will need to file your tax return: forms, publications, tips, answers to frequently asked questions and updates on tax law changes.

\$ **Review! Review! Review!** Don't rush — we all make mistakes when we hurry and even a small one will slow down the processing of your return. Be sure to double-check all the Social Security Numbers and math calculations on your return, as these are the most common errors made by taxpayers.



\$ **Don't panic!** If you run into a problem, remember that the IRS can help. Visit www.irs.gov or call toll-free at 800-829-1040. Ψ

Moms & Dads Spending More Time With Their Children

Parents are spending more time with their children, and less time on other household and personal tasks. Since 1965, for example, married fathers have spent nearly three times as much time caring for their children: from 2.5 hours a week to 7 hours. Married mothers contribute more time as well, from 10.2 hours to 13.9 hours.

Where is the time coming from? Personal grooming is one area where parents have cut back. Fathers spend 7 hours a week on their grooming, down from 8.5 hours in 1965. Moms devote 8.2 hours a week to grooming, a reduction from 10.1 hours in 1965.

If you are struggling to find more time to spend with your family, try the following tips:

- **Less Screens.** Commit to spending less time watching TV, browsing the internet, etc.
- **Plan meals.** Make the week's meal schedule and buy the ingredients one week in advance. This save wasted time and energy on scrambling.
- **Schedule activities.** Develop a loose schedule for each afternoon (e.g., homework from 4-5, play from 5-6:30, dinner at 6:30, etc.). Ψ



“Some folks may live and learn; but by the time they’ve learned, it’s usually too late.”

~ Zig Zigler, author and motivational speaker



Use the “24-Hour Rule” to Stay Focused

Renowned pro football coach Don Shula’s successful career was based, in part, on a policy of looking forward to the next challenge instead of dwelling on his previous victories or failures. Shula’s “24-hour rule” exemplified that.

The coach allowed himself, his fellow coaches and his players 24 hours at the maximum to celebrate a victory — or agonize over a defeat. Shula encouraged them to feel the emotions of success or failure as deeply as they could.

After 24 hours, though, the team was expected to stop talking and thinking about the experience and focus their concentration on preparing for the next game.

The lesson? Keep your failures and victories in perspective, and you’ll do better in the long run. Ψ

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- Keep the topic visible. Obesity is an important health issue – not a handicap (though it's the root of some disabilities). Talk about it; but be sensitive to those already disabled due to obesity and do not criticize or judge.
- Learn your BMI. Tell others. Volunteer to help a friend learn his/her BMI.
- Make a plan. If your goal is to maintain or reduce weight, talk about it with friends, even if they are overweight.
- Commit to increasing activity and healthy eating, and ask your social group to support and join you.

As your health improves and habits change, you will have a positive influence on your friends and family. Ψ

Hug Away Tension

Cuddling is good medicine for your heart, says a study from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In a study by Karen Grewen, Ph.D., one group of couples was told to hold hands with their partners and then hug, while another group simply sat quietly next to their mates. When everyone was asked to describe a recent upsetting event, heart rates in the no-contact group rose by twice that of the huggers.

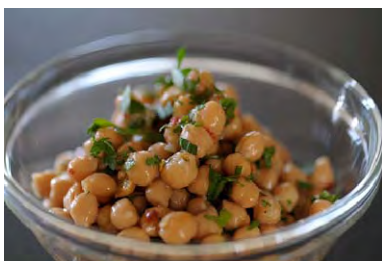


This finding was not a surprise to Miami's Touch Research Institute where studies have shown that touch lowers the body's output of the stress hormone cortisol and triggers a surge of feel-good brain chemicals. Ψ

Chickpea & Parsley Salad

from www.cookthink.com (© 2006-2010 Cookthink LLC)

Flavored bean salads are a simple, satisfying side dish on a weeknight, or as part of a big Mediterranean spread. Try this dish with different herbs, spices and citrus juices.



Servings: 2 – 4
Prep time: 15 min
Cook time: 5 min

Ingredients:

2 15-oz cans chickpeas, rinsed and drained
 ½ cup chopped fresh parsley
 1 clove garlic, minced
 2 tablespoons olive oil
 5 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
 ¼ teaspoon salt
 ⅛ teaspoon fresh ground black pepper
 ⅛ teaspoon red pepper flakes

Instructions:

In a large bowl, toss all the ingredients together. If you've got the time, let the salad marinate at room temperature for 30 minutes or more. Add more salt, pepper or red pepper flakes to taste.