

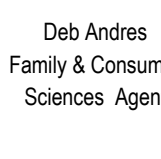
Flint Hills District

K-STATE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION NEWS

December/January 2024-2025



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Winter Months & Mental Health

The darkest day of 2024 will be the winter solstice on Dec. 21. It is the shortest day and longest night of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. For some, this offers a better opportunity for a good night's sleep, but for others – it can contribute to darkness that threatens their mental health.

You are not alone if this time of year makes you feel a little down! Fewer daylight hours and cold temps can make many of us want to hibernate and the temptation to snack and snuggle with our blankets doesn't help. There are several proven techniques for beating the winter blues – get moving, eat some nutritious food, connect with others, and get professional help if necessary.

A bit of rest and relaxation can be a good start. However, too much of a good thing can be bad. The key to living well is balance – get some rest, enjoy some activities, chill out, connect with friends and family, among other things. Also, talk with a doctor or mental health professional if you want some specific, very personalized help. There is certainly no shame in getting personalized support just for you!

Certainly, the winter months – especially around the holidays – can lead to a great deal of stress. Not all stress is bad stress, as the reactions in our bodies created by stress can help save us from dangerous or negative situations. For instance, the body's reaction to an oncoming car would typically cause a driver to act quickly and move the vehicle out of the way to avoid being hit. However, chronic stress, or stress that results when a stressful situation persists for a long time, can have negative consequences on mental, physical and emotional health. Some of the consequences of chronic stress may be short-term ailments or conditions such as headaches, digestive issues, sleeplessness or irritability. Also, people under stress may be more prone to viral infections like the common cold or the flu. Other consequences of chronic stress may be long-term, serious health problems such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, depression or anxiety disorder. Because of the link between stress and our health, and since stress may be unavoidable at times is important to be aware of methods or techniques to cope with stress.

General healthy habits are a great starting point for managing stress. These include:

- Eating a healthy diet
- Getting enough sleep each night
- Getting at least thirty minutes of exercise on five different days each week
- Moderating caffeine intake
- Keeping in touch with friends or loved ones who are sources of emotional support
- Obtaining proper healthcare

A few other strategies for managing stress include mindfulness practices, breathing exercises, and engaging in outdoor activities, to name a few. K-State Horticulture Extension Specialist, Cynthia Domenghini, shares the importance of being aware of our mental health in the winter months and using outdoor activities to help brighten each day. See the insert article to learn more.

Upcoming Flint Hills District Extension Dates

2024

December
7—

Medicare Open Enrollment Ends!

9—

We welcome a new office professional to Flint Hills District. Kayna Hastings is joining our staff and we invite you to drop by and say hello at the Council Grove office while she is in training the next few weeks.

24—27

Offices closed for Christmas. Thank you for understanding that our staff will be spending time with family and friends. We appreciate your support!

2025

January
1—

Offices closed for New Year's Day holiday.

What is your 4-H Story?

Think back to that experience that made a difference in your life. It is not about the ribbon, but more importantly the knowledge that was secured through the hard work and determination of being involved. The lifetime connections that were made through a camp experience or just the remembrance of a night with friends at the county fair. Your story is important and volunteers are needed more than ever.

4-H is kicking off a National Campaign, "Beyond Ready" which is to build a ready generation for a world of change. For our youth the road ahead may be challenging, yet 4-H'ers are succeeding. Data shows that compared to their peers they are:

- 2X more likely to have the goal of being a leader
- 3X more likely to participate in community service
- 2X more likely to report living life with intentionality and purpose

As we look ahead to 2025, it's a year of celebration and reflection for Kansas 4-H. We'll be commemorating two major milestones that highlight the rich history and enduring impact of our programs: the 120th anniversary of Kansas 4-H and the 80th anniversary of Rock Springs Ranch as the state 4-H center. These significant achievements not only honor the dedication and hard work of those who have come before us but also inspire us to continue advancing the mission of 4-H in Kansas. Your support in making the "Beyond Ready" initiative a success will ensure that we can build upon these legacies, creating new opportunities for generations to come.

4-H programs are founded in the belief that kids learn best by doing. Members complete hands-on projects in areas of science, health, agriculture and civic engagement, in a positive environment where they receive guidance from adult mentors and are encouraged to take on leadership roles. Members can explore "Sparks" or project areas of interest and then focus on attaining their goals through project meetings, camps, clinics, judging competitions, club meetings and our county fair.

How can you impact the life of a 4-Her? How does my 4-H story continue to be a valuable asset in our Flint Hills District? There are many opportunities to step up and become an adult leader in 4-H. We are always looking for project leaders, fair superintendents, club day judges, fair judges, clinicians and more. Don't let your 4-H story end with high school. We can make a difference in the lives of members by continuing to deliver our stories through the vision of Kansas 4-H and our local community. For information on how to make a difference, check out the KS 4-H Website or call the local extension office. Together we can make sure that our local 4-Hers are "Beyond Ready."

Food Safety Tip: Clean the Kitchen Sink

The kitchen sink is used for a variety of tasks and activities. Kansas State University food scientist Karen Blakeslee says preventing bacteria that causes foodborne illness is especially important in the kitchen sink.

"We use the kitchen sink for food preparation and more," Blakeslee said. "The possibility exists for foodborne illness-causing bacteria to hang out in the sink too. These bacteria could cross-contaminate your food and make you sick."

Food Safety Tip (continued)

Blakeslee added that a recent USDA study tested surfaces where participants prepared a breakfast meal with raw sausage, shell eggs, and a fruit salad made with cut-up cantaloupe. Test results showed that 34% of the sinks were contaminated after preparing the meal.

Even more scary, 26% of the samples of cut-up cantaloupe from the fruit salad were contaminated after breakfast prep.

"The bacteria in the sink or on your hands can cross-contaminate from the sink to other items, including those you normally eat raw. This means you'll be eating that bacteria too," Blakeslee said.

After using your sink to wash or prepare food, clean and sanitize the sink:

- 1) Use warm, soapy water to wash the sink. Wipe it clean with paper towels.
- 2) Use a sanitizer and let air dry. Sanitizers can be homemade (1 tablespoon of liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water) or use a commercial sanitizer or sanitizing wipe.

With so many cooks in the kitchen during the holidays, being attentive to food safety is more important than ever. For more information of holiday food safety, check out the wide variety of resources on the K-State Research & Extension Food Safety website at: <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/foodsafety/topics/holiday.html>

The holiday season is wrapped up in giving. Food pantries are often the benefactors of holiday food drives whose purpose is to help our communities combat food insecurity and insufficiency. An important part of that effort is to ensure healthy choices in our local food pantries.

Donating food. Help your local food pantry improve the quality of food it distributes by donating healthier items:

- **Fruits:** Canned fruit (such as peaches, pears and pineapples) in water or its own juices, no sugar-added applesauce, dried fruits (such as raisins, cranberries and apricots) or 100 percent canned or boxed juices.
- **Vegetables:** Low-sodium or "no-salt-added" canned vegetables and soups.
- **Grains:** Brown rice, oatmeal, popcorn, and whole grain cereals, pastas and crackers, and whole wheat tortillas.
- **Protein:** Canned chicken, turkey or tuna (choose canned in water or lower fat), canned or dried beans (such as black, kidney, navy or pinto), unsalted nuts such as peanuts, almonds or walnuts, and peanut butter.
- **Dairy:** Examples include non-fat dry milk, evaporated or canned milk, and pudding cups made with milk (non-refrigerated). Examples of non-dairy sources of calcium include breakfast bars, canned or bottled juices, ready-to-eat cereals, and oatmeal with added calcium.

Consider donating healthy food items, like the ones to the right, to food drives.

Picture source: Cornell University Cooperative Extension Service.

Holiday Food Drives

SAMPLE SHOPPING LIST

FRUITS (No-Sugar Added)

- 100% Fruit Juice
- Raisins/Dried Fruit
- Applesauce
- Fruit Cups



VEGGIES (Low-Sodium)

- Salsa
- Canned Vegetables
- Canned Soups
- Tomato Sauce

GRAINS (Whole-Grains)

- Quinoa
- Brown Rice
- Rolled Oats
- Whole-Grain Pasta

PROTEIN (Lean Protein)

- Canned Tuna & Chicken (in water)
- Dried Beans
- Unsalted Nuts
- Peanut Butter

DAIRY (Fat-Free or Low-Fat)

- Powdered or Evaporated Milk
- Shelf-Stable Soy Milk

OTHER

- Baby Food/Formula
- Tea/Coffee