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# Life Times

*A bimonthly publication to enhance the quality of life of individuals, families, and communities*

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### We're on the Web!

This *LifeTimes* newsletter is available on the Web at <http://outreach.missouri.edu/cregion/lifetimes/>



### Extension's Mission

*University Outreach and Extension serves Missouri by extending research-based knowledge and high-quality educational programs to address the high-priority needs of citizens at the local level.*

## Calcium: There's more than bones about it



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Calcium helps protect us from which of the following?

- a. Osteoporosis
- b. Hypertension
- c. Weight gain
- d. Cancer
- e. Premenstrual Syndrome
- f. All of the above

If you connected calcium with strong bones and chose "a," that's good. It is important to realize that calcium is a powerhouse nutrient for bones for people of all ages.

However, calcium has other functions all over the body, such as nerve and muscle function, and even maintenance of a regular heart rhythm. In addition, emerging research is showing calcium to be valuable in protecting us from all the

### Moms matter.

Studies show children are more likely to choose milk over soda if they see their mom make this choice.

other conditions listed previously. So the correct answer to the quiz is "f." Here is a summary of each benefit.

**Osteoporosis.** There is no refuting the fact that adequate calcium promotes both bone building and bone maintenance. When calcium intake is too low, it is released from the skeleton. Deficiencies over time lead to weakened bones, as well as debilitating pain and fractures in old age.

USDA statistics show that less than 40 percent of boys and 30 percent of girls, ages 6 to 11, meet their calcium needs on a daily basis. The National Academy of Sciences suggests children, ages 6 to 8, need 800 mg of calcium daily, the amount found in three 8-ounce glasses of milk. Kids of ages 9 to 18 need 1300 mg of calcium, the amount in four 8-ounce glasses of milk.

Moms matter. Studies show children are more likely to choose milk over soda if they see their mom make this choice.

Calcium is not just for children. If available, calcium can be deposited in bone not only during the growing years, but also up to age 25 or so. But the benefits do not stop there.



*(continued on page 4)*

# Positive communication can strengthen families

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Communication is an important part of a satisfying parent-child relationship. Adult-child interactions affect all family relationships. Therefore, effective communication is a basic building block for strong families.

To be able to understand what's communicated, a person must listen, decode the message, and then give feedback. This process ensures the receiver understood the message in the same context in which it was sent. Communication includes speaking, writing, reading, listening, understanding and evaluating.

Research suggests that the best parent-child relationships involve a lot of positive communication and interaction. In such relationships, communication happens on a regular basis, not just when there is conflict. Parents' interactions with their children can be more rewarding when they understand how children of different ages communicate and what topics interest them. Researchers believe that when adults and children stay in touch through attention and conversation, children may be less likely to "act out" or behave in ways that cause conflict or require discipline.

Just as regular communication with children creates satisfying parent-child relationships, adults who take time to really listen and learn about each other discover ways to more effectively communicate with other adults. We are all shaped



by a number of factors, including ethnic background, religion, class, race, age, profession, places where we have lived, life experiences, and many other individual and group influences. The best communication happens as we discover, respect, and respond to the individual uniqueness of the person with whom we are communicating.

## Here are some tips to help improve communication:

- **Be aware of potential distractions and adjust your surroundings as needed.** If your audience's attention is elsewhere, your message will probably not get through. Turn off the TV, for example, or wait until the distraction is ended before continuing your conversation.
- **Pay attention to your body language.** The way you hold your body, your tone of voice, eye contact, and inflection all affect the communication process.
- **Be specific and get to the point.** People will appreciate it if you don't waste their time with unnecessary words.
- **Respect the personal space of others.** People may begin to feel uncomfortable if you stand closer than 18 inches. However, they may think you're trying to avoid them by standing more than 4 feet away.
- **Remember that communication goes two ways.** When you pay attention to feedback you receive, you can adjust what you say or how you say it to communicate more effectively.

➤ **Silence can be an appropriate response.** If you need a few moments to gather your thoughts before responding, say something like "Could I have just a moment to think about that?" or "I'll have to think about that before I answer." Using statements such as these will let people know you're not ignoring them if you're silent.

➤ **Use "I" messages.** State how you feel, rather than accusing the other person of wrongdoing or putting the other person down. Here's a helpful "formula" to remember: "**I feel** (describe your feelings) **when you** (state the unacceptable behavior) **because** (describe the effect of the behavior). **I prefer** (state what you want)." For example: "I feel upset when you're late for dinner because everyone's food gets cold. I prefer that you get here on time."

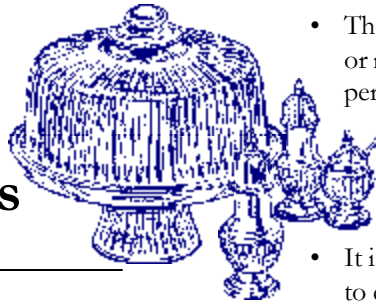
By taking steps to improve your communication skills, you will be more likely to increase the number of positive interactions with those around you. This can help to strengthen your family and to improve your quality of life.

**Source:** Adapted from *Building Strong Families* curriculum, University of Missouri Outreach and Extension.

## To learn more about communicating with kids of different ages:

See guide sheet #GH 6123, *Communicating Effectively with Children*. Available online at <http://muextension.missouri.edu/explore/hesguide/humanrel/gh6123.htm> or in print from your local Extension office.

# Passing on personal possessions



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Almost everyone has personal belongings—such as wedding photographs, a baseball glove, or a glass dish—that contain meaning for them and for other members of their family. What happens to your personal belongings when you die? Who decides who gets what? How can decisions be made during one's lifetime?

Planning for the transfer of such items is a challenge facing the items' owners, family members and legal representatives who may be left to make decisions when a family member dies.

**Most people want to be "fair" to all members when their belongings are transferred, but fair may not mean equal.**

Houses, land, and automobiles have titles, while tools, a set of china or family photos do not. It should be no surprise that the transfer of non-titled personal property can create more challenges among family members than the transfer of titled property. Here are some reasons why:

- Personal belongings have different meaning for each individual.



- The sentimental value or meaning attached to personal property is what's often important, not the dollar value.
- It is often very difficult to divide items having sentimental value in a way that all parties consider to be fair.
- People commonly have different perceptions of what is a fair process and what are fair results.
- Talking about one's possessions is much more personal than talking about other types of financial assets. It often means facing one's own death, as well as the death of family members.

When it's not easy to measure the value of someone's personal possessions in dollars, transferring such property becomes even more challenging and sensitive.



The transfer of property in a way that is not deemed fair may result in hurt feelings and damage to family relationships. Most people want to be "fair" to all members when their belongings are transferred, but *fair* may not mean *equal*.

Many have a tendency to avoid the sensitive issue of personal property transfer for a variety of reasons. Some may feel uncomfortable bringing up death or worry that others might think they are greedy. Some may think they have nothing of value or that no one will listen anyway. People may think that "this will not be a problem in my family," or assume that family members will never disagree.

## Here are some suggestions on how to talk about sensitive issues:

- Choose a time and place where there will be no distractions by telephone, television, radio or visitors.
- Practice what you might say before talking to family members who should be involved in the discussion.
- Use "I" messages to describe how you feel. Avoid "you" messages that focus on what you want other people to do, say or feel. (*See "Positive Communication" article, page 2.*)
- Make a list of major concerns before contacting family members.
- To create a less threatening environment, share a meal together with the family.



*If you'd like to know more about dealing with transferring property in your family, Extension offers two related programs: "Who Gets Grandma's Yellow Pie Plate?" and "Critical Conversations About Financing Long-Term Care."*

For more information, contact Sherron Hancock, Suzanne Zemelman, Elizabeth Reinsch, Sandra McKinnon or any Life Times contributor for a referral. (*See phone numbers, page 4.*)

## Calcium: There's more than bones about it

(continued from page 1)

Calcium continues to slow bone loss and reduce fracture rates into a person's eighties.

Two more factors are needed for strong bones besides calcium. Vitamin D is needed for absorption, and regular weight-bearing exercise is needed to build bone.

**Hypertension.** One in five Americans suffers from hypertension, or high blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease, stroke or kidney failure if uncontrolled. What you eat can help prevent or control hypertension.

The DASH diet, short for "Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension," works as well or better than single drug therapy for high blood pressure. The DASH diet features eight to 10 servings of fruits and vegetables a day, three servings of low-fat dairy, as well as reduced sodium. Real dairy foods proved twice as effective as calcium supplements in lowering blood pressure.

**Obesity.** In 1999, nearly 61 percent of U.S. adults were overweight or obese, and 13 percent of children and adolescents were overweight. The incidence of obesity in children, ages 6 to 11, has increased 50 percent in the last 40

years, greatly increasing the likelihood they will be obese adults.

Many of us cut down on dairy foods when dieting in an attempt to reduce fat. But that may be a mistake.

Several studies suggest that including *more* calcium from dairy products, not less, helps with weight loss. One study from Purdue University, published in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, December 2000, showed that those women with the highest intake of calcium from dairy lost the most weight and body fat over a two-year period. In addition, children who consume milk, cheese and yogurt are leaner than those who skimp on dairy products. It seems that three servings of dairy, which provide 1000 mg of calcium, will fill you up -- not out.

**Colon cancer.** Colorectal cancer is the third-leading cause of cancer deaths in American women. Fatty diets are partly to blame because unabsorbed fatty acids and bile acids irritate the colon and act as carcinogens. Calcium can block abnormal cell growth and bind up the excess bile and fatty acids. People with high calcium intake (1200 mg per day) are less likely to develop colorectal adenomas (precursors to colon cancer); and calcium supplements have reduced the risk of recurrence by 24 percent among those who've undergone polyp removal.

### Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS).

Forget all the supplements you have heard about to relieve PMS. Only calcium has stood up to scrutiny. In a 1998 study, 466 women with documented PMS received 1200 mg of calcium carbonate daily or a placebo. By the third cycle, the women taking calcium showed improvements in negative moods, food cravings, pain and fluid retention.

Given all the evidence, it seems clear that it's worth getting more calcium, especially from food sources.

## Reader Survey Results

Thanks to those returning the recent survey. The results will guide our future content and we are updating our mailing lists. The survey is available on our web site if you still want to complete it.

- 199 surveys received.
- *LifeTimes* is improving people's lives by helping them to lead a healthier life.
- Subscription numbers are increasing (almost 3700) and many more people are reached because you share your copy with others or tell others of information you have read.
- The most requested topics for future articles relate to nutrition/health and housing/garden.

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