

Cooperative Extension

FCHS SPOTLIGHT: Our Faculty & Staff



Kathleen T. Morgan

Name, Title, Credentials:

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City & County of Office Location:

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Rutgers Cooperative Extension, New Brunswick, NJ

Number of Years with Extension:

23 years in the Department of Family & Community Health Sciences

◆ What Types of Programming do You Offer?

As a department chair, I do not have a regular teaching or program schedule. I provide guest lectures in academic classes when requested and I am on the Rutgers Speakers Bureau. I do get calls from community organizations all the time. I have given talks on the Mediterranean Eating Plan, Nutrition and Aging, and Osteoporosis Prevention.

◆ What Project Do You Currently Spend Most of Your Time On?

My main goal is to encourage and promote the mission and vision of FCHS within the FCHS Department and to advocate for the Department. Much of my time, I serve as a mentor and facilitator for the faculty and staff within the department as they carry out the mission of the department. I function as the administrator of the department in accomplishing tasks such as monitoring the department budget, encouraging faculty/staff to engage in professional development, organizing and presiding at department meetings. A good portion of my time is spent acting as a representative of the FCHS Department within the Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences administration, as well as, the link between FCHS and other Departments of Rutgers University along with the New Jersey Departments of Health, Agriculture and Education.

◆ Name One FCHS Resource You Think More Consumers Should Know About?

Consumers should be aware of the wealth of knowledge and expertise that the county-based FCHS Educators have. I am never shy about telling stories about their great projects and the tremendous goodwill

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So Many Ways to Prepare Vegetables!

Sherri Cirignano, MS, RD, LDN, FCHS Educator of Warren County



We all know that vegetables provide us with a multitude of important nutrients including fiber, vitamins and minerals, and

health benefits such as protection against heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke and certain types of cancer. Despite this, the majority of people are not meeting vegetable intake recommendations. State surveys report that about 23% of adults and 38% of adolescents eat vegetables less than once each day.

So what should our daily vegetable intake look like? Actual recommendations for vegetable intake vary by age, gender and activity level, but average to about 2–3 cups of vegetables for women and 3–4 cups for men each day. Choosing a variety of different types and colors of vegetables including dark green leafy, red and orange is also recommended. And all forms count. This means they can be raw, cooked, frozen, canned, dried, whole, cut-up or mashed, and even vegetable juice counts.

Because our body uses the nutrients in vegetables differently when they are eaten raw vs. eaten cooked, we should vary our vegetable preparation methods as well. There are many ways to prepare vegetables to enhance their flavors, preserve their nutrients and colors and keep them interesting to eat.

Blanching – Plunge vegetables into boiling water for 1-3 minutes and quickly transfer to ice water to stop the cooking process. This is good for hard vegetables such as carrots, broccoli, and peppers to make them tender crisp, prep them for later use or prepare them for freezing.

Braising – Place vegetables in a small amount of liquid such as broth or water. The liquid can be flavored with chopped tomatoes, onion, garlic, or herbs and then be used as the sauce for the vegetables. Braising is best for long cooking vegetables such as carrots, kale or potatoes.

Grilling – Brush vegetables with a small amount of oil or marinate them in something such as teriyaki sauce or low fat dressing and place in a grilling pan or on skewers. This works well for tomatoes, large mushrooms, eggplant, zucchini, summer squash, potatoes, and peppers.

Microwaving – Place vegetables in a microwave safe container with a small amount of liquid and stir or rotate during cooking to prevent drying and hot spots. This is good for frozen vegetables and vegetables that require a long cooking time such as carrots or sweet potatoes.

Roasting – Toss vegetables in a small amount of oil and seasoning and roast at high heat, about 400-450°F until tender in shallow baking pan in one layer. This is great for cooking winter squash, carrots, beets, potatoes, sweet potatoes, eggplant, peppers and tomatoes.

Shredding – This method uses raw vegetables, forming them into long thin strips with the use of a hand grater or a food processor. They have many uses but are particularly nice in salads and sandwiches. Try shredding Brussel sprouts, zucchini, carrots, and cabbage or dense lettuce leaves such as Swiss chard, turnip greens and escarole.

Steaming – Place vegetables in a steamer basket above boiling water. Tightly cover the pan to keep the steam in and cook until tender crisp. Steaming preserves more nutrients, flavor and texture than other cooking methods and is especially good for green vegetables.

Stir-frying – Use a small amount of oil, fat free broth or nonstick spray and cook vegetables over high heat, tossing continuously until tender crisp. Small pieces of vegetables work best with this method. A wok is the traditional pan for stir-frying, but a heavy skillet will work as well.



Learn more about the health benefits of vegetables by visiting <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/functional-foods/podcasts.asp> to listen to the podcast Bringing Vegetables to the Table: A Celebration of the Harvest

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Eat Berries to Improve Brain Function

Karen Ensle Ed.D., RDN, FAND, CFCS, FCHS Educator, Union County



Eating berries is healthful and may help your brain to improve your memory. The latest research indicates that we are eating more berries than in the past. They are a great source of vitamins, minerals and fiber along with flavonoids, a diverse group of phytonutrients (plant chemicals) found in almost all fruits and vegetables. Along with carotenoids, they are responsible for the vivid colors in fruits and vegetables. Flavanols, a type of flavonoid, are found in berries giving them antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects that reduce and repair cell damage. Anthocyanins found in red, blue and purple berries can cross the blood-brain barrier to protect the brain cells from aging and also diseases such as cancer. Some recent studies conducted on humans show promising results. However, more research needs to be done. Below are some reasons to increase the number of servings of berries that you eat weekly.

► **Berries Improve the Memory.** A study, <http://doi.org/10.4103/1673-5374.139483> conducted with young and old adult participants who ate blueberries, showed an increase of blood flow to key areas of the brain, improvements in memory and attention to required tasks. Other tests with seniors eating strawberries and blueberries for several months showed improved memory as compared to those in a placebo group. Additional studies with children drinking smoothies made with berries, showed an increase in memory tests as compared to those drinking non-berry smoothies.



► **Aging Process Decreases with Berry Consumption.** Improvements in brain function may help fight the natural decline that happens during the aging process. An increase in the number of new neurons in the brain, a result of consuming berries, may be one reason that the aging process slows down. Recent clinical research has demonstrated that berries can prevent age-related neurodegenerative diseases and improve movement and brain function. Berries can also change the pathways involved in causing inflammation, cell survival, nerve cell transmission and ability of the nerve cell to be flexible. The neuroprotective effects of berries on neurodegenerative diseases are related to phytochemicals (plant chemicals) such as anthocyanin, catechin, and quercetin. More studies with humans are needed to replicate the results that have been published.



► **Preventing Dementia is Hopeful.** Vascular dementia is caused by clogged arteries and veins which slow down the blood flow to the brain. Eating more fruit and vegetables, including berries, seems to protect the brain. Compounds found in berries, not only protect the brain from oxidative stress, but also counteract advanced glycation end-products called AGEs, which have been linked to other age changes such as Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's disease is one type of neurodegenerative disease, an umbrella term for a range of conditions which primarily affect the neurons in the human brain. Neurons are the building blocks of the nervous system which includes the brain and spinal cord. Neurons normally don't reproduce or replace themselves, so when they become damaged or die they cannot be replaced by the body. Examples of neurodegenerative diseases include Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, and Huntington's disease.



Multiple studies demonstrate the benefits of berries including the protection against the negative effects of a high fat diet and the ability to boost a person's mood and decrease the risk for developing depression. Many of the controlled human trials have used blueberries, however other berries, including raspberries, blackberries, and strawberries, also have many of the bioactive compounds that improve brain function.

Eating berries on a regular basis along with other fruit and vegetables will ensure that the protective compounds of berries, are in your blood stream helping to improve your brain function at all ages. Take small steps to include berries on your cereal for breakfast, include berries in a smoothie for lunch, or try adding berries to a salad, main dish or dessert for dinner. Berries provide a healthful addition to a regular diet.

How Adding Some Extra Flavor to Your Meals Can Give You a Health Boost

Megan Denos, *Dietetic Intern, Montclair State University*
 Sara Elnakib, *RD, MPH, CHES, FCHS Educator, Passaic County*




Spices are a great way to add some extra flavor to your food, but did you know that they can also add great possible health benefits?

Spices come from plants that are packed with phytonutrients that are chemical compounds in foods that have a variety of health benefits including antioxidant properties, cancer-fighting properties, and anti-inflammatory properties.

Antioxidants are substances, such as vitamins C and E that combat some of the damage done by oxidation in the body. Oxidation is a natural part of chemical reactions in the body; however, it creates unstable particles called free radicals that can be harmful.

These compounds in spices are believed to help protect cells from damage, prevent cancer, fend off heart disease, and even diminish some of the effects of aging on the body. Studies even show that adding spices to meat before cooking may reduce the formation of dangerous carcinogens during the cooking process.

Phytonutrients and antioxidants are very concentrated in certain spices – in fact just ½ teaspoon of ground cloves contains more antioxidants than ½ cup of blueberries. The next time you sprinkle some seasonings into a pot of soup or chili on the stove – just think of all of the rich health benefits that you’re adding as well!

Spice	Health Benefits	How To Use It
Cinnamon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studies show that cinnamon may help lower LDL (“bad”) cholesterol as well as blood sugar. • Cinnamon has very potent antioxidant effects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is very versatile so it can be used in sweet or savory dishes. • Try sprinkling on cereal, oatmeal, yogurt, or toast! • Try adding to meat marinades or a quinoa salad.
Garlic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research has shown that garlic may promote cardiovascular health. • People who consume more garlic may have a lower chance of developing certain types of cancer, particularly stomach and colon cancers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a popular addition to Chinese, French, Greek, Indian, Italian, and Spanish cuisines – just to name a few! • Use minced garlic in soups, marinades, and sauces.
Ginger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ginger has been used for many years to help with nausea, bloating, and heartburn. • It also functions as an antioxidant – it may protect organs and tissues in the body from oxidative stress in order to prevent growth and development of cancer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ginger is a great way to add a gentle spice to many foods. • Try adding it to smoothies, yogurt, oats, or cereal. • It makes a great addition to salad dressings, stir fries, or vegetables.




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Tempest, M., RD. (2012, March). Adding Spice for a Healthier Life — Evidence Shows Antioxidant-Rich Herbs and Spices May Cut Chronic Disease Risk. *Today’s Dietitian*, 14(3), 40.

Spice It Up! How Adding Some Extra Flavor to Your Meals Can Give You a Health Boost - continued from page 4

Spice	Health Benefits	How To Use It
Turmeric 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research shows that turmeric may help prevent heart disease, arthritis, Alzheimer's disease, and certain cancers. • The polyphenol compound in turmeric, curcumin, inhibits expression of the gene that is thought to lead to breast cancer growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This spice adds a little bit of a curry flavor and a bright yellow color! • It goes great with rice, vegetable dishes, curry dishes, and even tea.
Cloves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cloves are filled with polyphenols, which have antioxidant properties. • Cloves have shown their capability to inhibit multiple oxidative processes that are damaging to the body. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This spice goes well in any dish with cinnamon or ginger. • Try adding it to pancakes, muffins, applesauce, oatmeal, or mashed sweet potatoes.
Oregano 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oregano is packed with phytonutrients and has a very high antioxidant capacity. • Research shows that it may increase antioxidant activity in the brain as well as total antioxidant status of the body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This spice goes well in many Italian dishes. • Try it in pasta and pizza sauces! • Get creative and add it to scrambled eggs, salad dressings, grilled cheese sandwiches, or sautéed vegetables.

This is just a small glimpse into the world of spices! When using spices, a few key tips include:

- 1 Check expiration dates for their shelf life.** The recommendation for freshness dating is four years for whole spices and two years for ground. Most spices are only harvested once a year, so it doesn't make sense to replace these spices every six months as some spice companies recommend. Stored spices do best in temperatures below 70° and in lower humidity environments. When spices are stored in glass jars they tend to retain more of their essential oil content and flavor.
- 2 To maintain optimum flavor** and the greatest value from your spices, store in air tight containers and keep them in a cool, dark place. Keep containers tightly closed to protect them from moisture and oxidation and keep them away from direct sunlight to prevent their color from fading.
- 3 Never store your spices above your stove** as the additional heat will cause degradation of their quality and do not store spices directly above a dishwasher as the increased humidity will shorten their shelf life. While achieving both of these may be impractical in your kitchen, the closer you get to the ideal storage recommended, the better the flavor and health benefits of the spices.

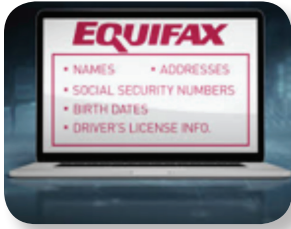
If spices and herbs are kept as recommended above, the shelf life will be as follows:

- Whole spices and dried herbs, leaves and flowers will keep 1 year.
- Seeds will keep 2–3 years and whole roots (i.e. ginger root) will keep 3 years.
- Ground spices and herb leaves keep 1 year.
- Ground roots will keep for 2 years.

Most spices aren't "spicy" at all and won't add heat to your dish, but will provide additional flavor and possible health benefits.

25 Ways to Be Vigilant After the Equifax Data Breach

Dr. Barbara O'Neill, *Extension Specialist in Financial Resource Management, Rutgers Cooperative Extension*



Ever since the Equifax hack was announced on September 7, 2017, the phrase “be vigilant” has been used with little or no explanation about how to actually do this. According to online dictionaries, vigilant means “being on the lookout for danger” or “being keenly watchful and ever alert.” That sounds fine, but the reality is personal identification information (PII) of 143 million people is now “out there” forever.

What to do? Convert vague advice into concrete action steps that can be practiced for the remainder of your life. Why? Hacked data can remain dormant for years before it is actually misused. In addition, people can only take action to stop new credit account fraud. Other frauds, unfortunately, can only be detected after they happen. Proactive measures such as fraud alerts on credit cards and credit freezes will also not deter non-credit related frauds such as tax refund identity theft and health insurance fraud.

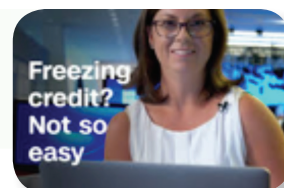
Below are 25 vigilant practices to put into practice:

- ➔ **Carefully Review Credit Card Statements** - Look for unauthorized charges and/or unknown merchants. Especially beware of small charges (e.g., \$1) that fraudsters may make in anticipation of larger charges later and suspicious recurring charges for products or services that were not purchased.
- ➔ **Carefully Review Bank Account Statements** - Look for unauthorized withdrawals and account transfers.
- ➔ **Reconcile Your Checkbook Monthly** - Look for unauthorized transactions and checks with changed payees.
- ➔ **Secure Your Debit Cards** - Know that it can take weeks to recover funds that are stolen from a bank account.
- ➔ **Use Credit Cards Instead of Debit Cards** - Do this for better fraud protection and to postpone payment for a purchase.
- ➔ **Secure Your Checkbook** - Keep it out of plain sight at home and immediately report missing checks to your bank.
- ➔ **Consider a Credit Freeze** - Prevent lenders from reviewing your credit to head off new fraudulent accounts being opened in your name.
- ➔ **Use Strong Computer Passwords** - Don't use your birth date because this information has now been exposed.
- ➔ **Shred Personal Documents** - Use a crosscut shredder to destroy old credit card, bank, and brokerage firm statements.
- ➔ **Check Your Credit Report** - Request one credit report every four months on a rotating basis from the “Big Three” credit bureaus (Experian, Equifax, and TransUnion) via www.annualcreditreport.com.
- ➔ **Monitor Your Credit Score** - Look for a sharp drop in your credit score, which could indicate fraudulent activity.
- ➔ **Never Let Your Cards Out of Sight** - Use credit and debit cards for payment only where you can swipe them yourself. For gasoline and restaurant meals, pay at a cash register or keep attendants and servers in sight.
- ➔ **Secure Electronic Devices** - Put passwords on laptops, tablets, and phones if used for financial transactions.
- ➔ **Practice Digital Security** - Guard passwords, PINs, security questions, and other account login information.
- ➔ **Secure Sensitive Data at Home** - Do this especially when contractors, caregivers, and others have unsupervised access.
- ➔ **Smash Old PC Hard Drives and Cell Phones** - Do this to assure that sensitive saved data cannot be misused.
- ➔ **Beware of Phishing Frauds** - Delete suspicious e-mails and text messages that request PII and/or payment. Remember that future phishing schemes may be more personalized as a result of PII stolen in the Equifax hack.
- ➔ **Avoid Remote ATMs** - Do not use ATMs far from bank cameras that may have skimming devices attached to steal PII.

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- ➔ **Beware of Public Wi-Fi Connections** - Don't use unprotected Wi-Fi for purchases or banking transactions.
- ➔ **Take Advantage of Free Credit Monitoring** - Sign up for post-hack credit monitoring, when offered. It doesn't cost you anything and will save on regular costs that typically range around \$120 to \$150 per year.
- ➔ **File Your Income Taxes Early** - Beat fraudsters to your tax refund. They now have the name, address, and Social Security number of 143 million Americans, which is everything needed to file a fraudulent tax return.
- ➔ **Avoid Over-Withholding** - Adjust your tax withholding at work, using a new W-4 form, to get a smaller refund or no refund. If self-employed, adjust estimated tax payments. By doing this, you'll have little or no money stolen if someone uses your PII to claim a fraudulent tax refund.
- ➔ **Look for Suspicious Activity** - Beware of "red flags" for tax ID theft such as a tax notice from an unknown employer. If you receive such a notice, contact the employer to explain that someone stole your identity.
- ➔ **Beware of Phony IRS Pretexting** - Remember that the IRS rarely contacts taxpayers by phone and never by e-mail. Remember, the Equifax fraudsters have lots of information to sound convincing so delete or hang up.
- ➔ **Review Medical Bills and Explanation of Benefits (EOB) Statements** - Scrutinize bills and EOBs to look for medical services that were not received by you. Medical identity theft is very serious and can potentially lead to death if a fraudster's medical history (e.g., blood type and allergies) is co-mingled with a victim's.



Many of the above actions can become personal habits or "decision rules" that you simply adopt as a matter of practice (e.g., checking credit reports and bank statements). Others can be implemented on an "as needed" basis (e.g., smashing hard drives). The next time someone says "be vigilant" about protecting your identity, don't brush it off. Take positive action to protect yourself against future frauds and to detect possible fraud from your data that was stolen from Equifax.

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Thank you!

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they provide between Rutgers and the public in the counties. They provide evidence-based programs and resources that are available to them, such as the Functional Foods for Life Program; Small Steps to Health and Wealth; the Grow Healthy Teachers Institute; Get Moving, Get Healthy NJ Workforce; and the FCHS Master Food Preservers Program. These programs have been developed by faculty in the FCHS Department, peer-reviewed and then shared county-wide, state-wide and nation-wide through the Cooperative Extension network.



◆ What Makes FCHS Programs/Resources Unique?

FCHS Educators provide “evidence-based” programs to solve local/state problems. These FCHS faculty are unique when it comes to collaborating; they are always flexible and willing to help develop the best programs to build a culture of health in their community.

◆ What Nutrition/Health/Wellness Mantra Do You Live By?

There is no magic to living a healthy life; it is the small things that you do each day, like trying to eat the healthiest foods you can. Make some kind of physical activity a part of each day. “Get Moving, Get Healthy with FCHS” is our mantra. You get to start over again tomorrow! Make each day a healthy one!