

Cooperative Extension

Promoting Healthy Families, Schools and Communities: Making a Difference

Weight Loss and Wrestling:

Registered Dietitians Can Help!

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Weight classes are used in sports to promote a competition that is fair and safe by reducing the weight difference between competitors. Wrestling is an example of a weight class sport that requires athletes to partake in an official weigh-in to ensure each athlete has met the weight requirements. Many wrestlers aim to compete at the lowest possible weight class by “cutting” weight prior to competition. Losing weight at a healthy rate can help athletes develop a competitive advantage, though many wrestlers attempt to lose weight at rates that can be detrimental to their overall health.

Rapid weight loss (RWL) methods such as using laxatives, diuretics, self-induced vomiting, restricting caloric and fluid intake, training in heated rooms, and overexercising are practices that are all too familiar to the wrestling community (Hammer et al., 2023; Roklicer et al., 2022). These Rapid weight loss (RWL) strategies have been practiced by wrestlers for decades and have been normalized. Weight loss of more than 5% of body mass within 2 days prior to competition have been associated with acute health risks. (Castor-Praga et al., 2021). A study surveying one hundred sixty athletes from both wrestling and taekwondo disciplines discovered that 96% of participants reported using RWL strategies with 57% of those athletes losing more than 5% of their body mass prior to competition (Castor-Praga et al., 2021). These athletes reported experiencing side effects such as fatigue, confusion, rapid breathing, weakness, negative moods, increased heart rate, and blurred vision, as a result of their weight “cut” (Castor-Praga et al., 2021). The athletes who had a greater weight reduction reported greater adverse health effects. The adaptation of RWL strategies can also increase a wrestler’s risk of injury (Barley et al., 2019; Hammer et al., 2023).

A study on Division I wrestlers found that the risk of injury increased by 11% for every 1% of body weight they had lost (Kim & Park, 2023). RWL strategies involving dehydration have been shown to cause acute kidney injury (AKI) during the RWL phase despite the degree of weight loss (Lakicevic et al., 2021). AKI can cause waste products to accumulate in the bloodstream which can compromise the kidneys’ ability to maintain fluid balance. If AKI is not resolved, it can progress and cause damage to other organs such as the lungs, brain, and heart (National Kidney Foundation, 2022). The high intensity nature of the sport combined with the pressure to reach specific weight goals can contribute to the development of eating disorders amongst wrestlers, specifically in females (Alwan, 2022;

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Move to Improve Arthritis Symptoms

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Physical activity is an important part of a healthy lifestyle, it helps us to maintain a healthy weight, prevents chronic disease and improves mental health. It also helps people who have been diagnosed with osteoarthritis or other rheumatic conditions that affect the joints. Everyone should participate in 150 – 300 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic activity each week and include two additional days of muscle strengthening activity. This is also true for people with arthritis because regular, moderate intensity exercise has been shown to lessen pain and improve quality of life.



Joint-friendly exercises are recommended for arthritis patients. Examples of cardiovascular exercise for people with arthritis include cycling, brisk walking, water exercise, swimming, group fitness classes, light gardening, and dancing. Muscle strengthening activities like lifting weights, resistance bands, or yoga increase overall strength and stamina. Flexibility is important for people who have arthritis and stretching regularly will increase flexibility and improve your ability to do everyday tasks. To prevent falls, include balance exercise like tai chi, practice standing on one leg or participate in a group fitness class. Change your activity level to fit the level of your symptoms and participate in joint friendly activities. These activities will not worsen your symptoms and may help you live a more active lifestyle. Start slowly and increase the amount of exercise that your body is comfortable with. Be aware of what your body can tolerate, but don't make excuses to skip physical activity since it can reduce symptoms and improve your quality of life.

To start or continue exercising with arthritis, find movement that you enjoy. For instance, walking is a great exercise that can increase or decrease in intensity depending on symptoms. It is important to walk on even ground to prevent falls and in a well-lit area that is safe. Regular walking has benefits and can be done almost anywhere. Group fitness classes are another way to add in movement and ease symptoms. Yoga, aerobics, or Tai Chi are all good options for group fitness classes that allow movement, stretching and balance practice. If you haven't been



exercising regularly or find it too challenging, try starting out by doing just ten minutes at one time, three times per day. Be sure to warm up with light movement before exercising and wear clothing that is appropriate, including safe shoes.

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Exercise is sometimes portrayed as the cause of arthritis; however, evidence is being discovered to the contrary. In fact, regular physical activity can prevent obesity which is a leading cause of arthritis. Exercise strengthens muscles and reduces the likelihood of arthritis. Studies are still examining the effects of exercise in preventing arthritis, but some have shown an anti-inflammatory effect from exercise on arthritic joints and trials have discovered that physical activity has a protective effect on joint cartilage. It is important to realize that exercise is safe for arthritis patients and for disease prevention. Just make sure to exercise safely, within your limits and consult a doctor before beginning a new exercise routine.

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Engaging Kids in the Kitchen: Starting Healthy Habits for Life

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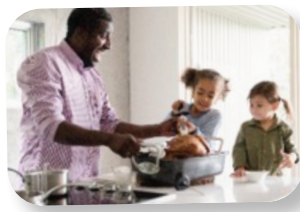
Looking to create adventurous eaters? Children who are involved in meal preparation eat more fruits and vegetables and have higher confidence in cooking and choosing healthy foods than those who are not involved. Learning to cook also fosters creativity, responsibility, and a sense of pride. Children are also more likely to eat something they helped to prepare.

Bringing children into the kitchen may sound like extra stress, but patience and persistence will help teach and cultivate skills that they can use for their entire lives. Once they master some skills, they will make great sous chefs, too!

You can start small: invite your child into the kitchen and offer them tastes of ingredients, as appropriate (no raw dough or meat). You can talk about the colors, scents, flavors, and textures of foods as they try them. Introducing the ingredients before it is time to sit and eat can reduce anxiety at mealtime. Other ways to engage children include asking them to help select recipes, let them experiment with seasonings, bringing them to the market, or asking them to create a name for a dish.

Cooking together can teach children math by counting, measuring, and using fractions. Following a recipe helps children learn to follow directions, plan, and complete projects. Talking through changes ingredients go through while cooking explores science concepts. Great discussions can be had about how foods support our health. Engaging children in cooking allows them to use new vocabulary as well.

It is important to teach children the importance of safety in the kitchen. You can set rules for your family so everyone is clear on expectations, such as pulling back long hair. Follow food safety basics with your family:



- ◆ **Wash hands** in warm, soapy water for 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- ◆ **Clean** work surfaces and utensils.
- ◆ **Keep raw** meat, poultry and seafood separate from cooked and other ready-to-eat foods.
- ◆ **Cook** to proper temperatures.
- ◆ **Refrigerate** promptly to 40°F or lower.

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Below are some activity examples.

As you allow your child to try tasks, it is OK if they struggle at first. Slow progression of tasks keeps children safe and allows them to build their skillsets. Supervision and safety are fundamental when introducing new tasks and to the success of your child.

Kitchen activity examples by age group:

2-year-olds and younger:

Invite kids into the kitchen so they become familiar with the environment. Be sure there are no hazards within reach. Allow them to play with measuring cups or wooden spoons for entertainment.

3 - 5-year-olds:

- Wash produce
- Add and stir ingredients
- Tear lettuce and greens
- Name and count foods
- Help build sandwiches and salads
- Cut soft produce with plastic or lettuce knife

6-7-year-olds:

- Peel washed produce
- Set the table
- Measure ingredients
- Pour liquids
- Cut herbs or green onions with clean, blunt scissors
- Spread soft spreads

8-9-year-olds:

- Use a can opener
- Check food temperatures with a thermometer
- Form meatballs or burgers
- Put away leftovers

10-12-year-olds:

- Boil pasta
- Microwave foods
- Follow a recipe
- Bake foods
- Simmer items

Seasonal Affective Disorder, Winter Blues, and Your Diet

Veronica M. Jones, PhD, MPH, CHES, FCHS Educator, Essex County



The photo here depicts a very wintery day. On the [January 17th Wellness Wednesday with FCHS](#), the audience was asked to describe how this picture made them feel. "Anxious, unhappy, cold, tired, stressed, blah" were among the responses. These are typical sentiments about cold and adverse weather. It is normal for many people to feel changes in their mood during the winter season. These feelings are often sadness, lack of motivation, or even isolation.

We experience darker days, with limited sunlight which can impact our time for outdoor activities or gatherings with family and friends. Some people may also notice changes in their appetite during the winter, particularly craving carbohydrate-rich foods.

Seasonal Affective Disorder vs. Winter Blues

It is common to hear people say they have Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD. But do they? Seasonal Affective Disorder impacts about five (5) percent of the U.S. population. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, SAD is a type of depression that usually lasts between four to five months during late Fall through early Spring. Symptoms of SAD include feeling depressed most of the day, limited interest in activities that you used to enjoy, changes in your appetite or weight (like overeating or not eating), sleeping difficulties, low energy, feeling hopeless, or having thoughts of self-harm. Someone with SAD will notice these changes and experience symptoms for at least two consecutive years. A doctor or mental health provider can diagnose SAD. Unlike SAD, having a case of the winter blues is less severe. You may experience some mild sadness or trouble sleeping; however, you can conduct your day-to-day activities.

Diet and Mood

The gut is considered our second brain, therefore what we eat impacts our gut health. We want to be sure we are keeping the bacteria in our guts balanced for better health. Bad or unhealthy gut bacteria can increase inflammation, cause ulcers, or other issues like abdominal cramping or nausea. To reduce bad bacteria, processed foods, high-sugar or starchy foods, and alcohol should be eaten moderately or not at all.

To help combat the winter blues, there are several healthy bacteria and mood-boosting vitamins and foods we should be consuming. Foods that will improve or boost your mood include:

- ◆ **Proteins.** Proteins are good for improving concentration. Good sources of protein include eggs, lean meat/poultry, and lentils or tofu as vegetarian options.
- ◆ **High-fiber fruits and vegetables.** The winter months may cause cravings for starchy food, so it is important to eat fiber. Fiber can help us feel full longer, which reduces the chances of overeating. High-fiber options include avocados, apples, berries, broccoli, and leafy greens. Nuts, grains, and seeds are also sources of fiber and make excellent choices for snacks.
- ◆ **Probiotics.** Probiotics support the gut by promoting good bacteria. Fermented yogurts, kimchi, and sauerkraut are examples of probiotic foods.
- ◆ **Seafood.** Salmon, mackerel, sardines, tuna, and shrimp contain omega-3 fatty acids. Foods rich in omega-3s are good for heart health and are said to help reduce depression and improve happiness.
- ◆ **Dark chocolate.** Dark chocolate has been linked to creating feelings of enjoyment, due to its being a source of antioxidants and minerals like iron, zinc, and magnesium.
- ◆ **Vitamin D.** Also known as the "sunshine vitamin" is something we naturally get from time in the sun. However, during the winter months and for people living in the Northeast, sun exposure can be limited. Be sure to have your vitamin D levels checked and take a supplement, if necessary.

There are distinctions between seasonal affective disorder and the winter blues. If you or someone you know is experiencing immediate distress, please seek assistance by calling a healthcare provider or the national helpline (800-273-8255). Mental health is important, so whether the symptoms of depression are mild or severe symptoms getting support is beneficial. As the spring season is just around the corner, below are general tips for finishing the winter strong.

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- <https://www.seafoodnutrition.org/resources/>
- <https://mhanational.org/creating-healthy-routines>

Winter Wellness Tips

- Get quality sleep
- Get natural light
- Be physically and socially active
- Eat balanced meals. Include mood boosting foods
- Seek help when needed

Fascinating Ferments

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Rachel Tansey, MA, *Senior FCHS Extension Associate*



Sauerkraut
(source: Kathleen Law)

When you hear the words 'fermented foods,' what is the first thing that pops into your mind? Perhaps, **sauerkraut, sourdough, kimchi, kefir, kombucha, beer, or wine?** These are all examples of food and drink products that have gone through the fermentation process. All around the world, these foods have been enjoyed throughout history. There is fermentation all around us, not just in the kitchen. Fermentation is used in **agriculture** for compost and animal feed; in **building homes** and **making products**, for clay and plastics; and even to make **fuel that is better for the environment**. Some medicines, skin care, and tobacco products also use fermentation.

Fermentation is a **chemical process where molecules, such as sugar, are broken down without oxygen**. Although this process is at least 10,000 years old, the way it worked was not known until the 1600s and not fully understood until the 1800s by scientist, Louis Pasteur. For thousands of years, fermentation has been used to **preserve foods**, for better taste and texture, and to make alcohol. More recently, we have seen other possible benefits, including **better gut health**.

Salt is used to ferment because it helps the good bacteria do its job and stops bad bacteria from taking over. Fermented foods may contain probiotics, which are **good bacteria** that result in positive health outcomes. These include fighting and forcing out bad bacteria, as well as making compounds that **help the nervous and immune systems**. Probiotics may also **promote heart and metabolic health**. Fermented foods usually contain prebiotics, which are fibers that feed the good gut bacteria.

Studies on **fermented milk products**, like yogurt and kefir, and **fermented Asian food items**, such as **kimchi, kochujang** (red pepper paste) and **chongkukjang** (fermented soybeans), have shown health benefits. These include positive effects on **type II diabetes, insulin control, obesity, total cholesterol levels, blood pressure, and bowel movements**. A more well-known fermented product in America, is sauerkraut. **Sauerkraut** has been found to contain antioxidants, promote liver and kidney function, and reduce IBS symptoms. **Sourdough bread** has gained popularity in the US in recent years, despite being a well-loved item in countries like Greece and Italy for much longer. Sourdough may be a **better bread choice for people with IBS**, because it has less of the compounds that may cause an IBS flare up. Other fermented products, like tempeh, miso, and natto, are now being looked at because they may help fight cancer, inflammation, diabetes, and contain antioxidants. Proper human trials are needed to verify the effects though.

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Grain bowl with sauerkraut & homemade hot pepper sauce
(source: Kathleen Law)



Good for the Gut Grain Bowl
(source: Kathleen Law)

Healthy Recipe

Good for the Gut Grain Bowl with Peanut Ginger Sauce

(created by Kathleen Law)

Ingredients

- ½ cup cooked grain (for example: brown rice, barley, farro, or quinoa)
- 1 serving cooked protein (for example: 4 oz. fish, 3 oz. chicken, or about ½ cup of beans or lentils)
- 1+ cup of roasted vegetables (for example: Brussels sprouts, eggplant, carrots, beets, asparagus, kohlrabi, mushrooms, onions, garlic)
- 2 tablespoons sauerkraut or kimchi
- **Bonus:** Add a handful of raw dark leafy or salad greens to your bowl! Try romaine, spinach, arugula, or massaged kale.

Peanut ginger sauce:

- 4 tablespoons of creamy peanut butter (can substitute any nut or seed butter or tahini)
- 2 tablespoons low sodium soy sauce, tamari, or coconut aminos
- 1 teaspoon fresh grated ginger
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- 3+ tablespoons of water to thin sauce to desired consistency

Instructions

Cook these items to your liking. For instance, bake or grill the fish or chicken. Legumes from a can or jar can be drained and rinsed, then eaten – or, they can be sautéed to add more flavor or baked for a crunchy texture. Beans and grains can be cooked from dry – follow the instructions on the package or check out the resources below.

For the sauce: Add sauce ingredients (except water) to a small jar or bowl, then whisk/mix together until combined. You will have a paste – add water to thin to your desired texture.

When all the ingredients are cooked/prepared, add them all to a bowl & enjoy!

Resources about cooking at home:

- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Learn to Cook at Home – <https://www.eatright.org/food/food-preparation/cooking-tips/learn-to-cook-at-home>
- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Six Creative Ways to Enjoy Beans – <https://www.eatright.org/food/food-groups/protein-foods/six-creative-ways-to-enjoy-beans>

Learn From Your Tax Return

Dr. Barbara O'Neill, Distinguished Professor and Financial Management Specialist Emeritus, Rutgers Cooperative Extension



By the time you read this article, your 2023 income tax return may be sent to the IRS or close to completion. You may be thinking that you are done thinking about taxes for another year, but you would be wrong. You can learn a lot by closely reviewing your tax return and scrutinizing details beyond the amount of your refund or how much you still owe.

Below are ten key features of your tax return to review for future financial planning:

- ✓ **INCOME SOURCES** - Understand the various types of **taxable income** that you earned including salary/wages, self-employment, interest, dividends, capital gains, Social Security, pensions, retirement plan withdrawals, rental income, and more. Identify which income sources are likely to increase, decrease, or go away in 2024.
- ✓ **TAX CREDITS AND DEDUCTIONS** - Review any tax credits that you claimed (e.g., child tax credit, earned income tax credit, retirement savers credit) and whether you can claim them in 2024. Ditto for tax deductions. Most people claim the standard deduction and it generally takes proactive planning to exceed the **standard deduction** amount.
- ✓ **TAX RATES AND BRACKETS** - Identify the marginal **tax rates** and income brackets applicable to your 2023 income level and tax filing status (i.e., single, head of household, married filing jointly, and married filing separately). Then estimate whether your tax rate and tax bracket will change in 2024.
- ✓ **TAX FILING STATUS** - Determine if there will be a change in your tax filing status from the previous year. Common examples are two single individuals who marry, married couples that divorce, and widowed individuals who must start filing as single taxpayers in the year following their spouse's death.
- ✓ **TAX WITHHOLDING** - Assess the accuracy of 2023 employer payroll tax withholding and/or quarterly estimated payments to the IRS to ensure proper tax withholding in 2024. This is especially important for self-employed individuals, taxpayers with multiple streams of income, and those with significant investment earnings.
- ✓ **RETIREMENT SAVINGS** - Review contributions made to retirement savings accounts, such as 401(k)s/403(b)s and IRAs, and their impact on taxable income. Then decide whether additional retirement plan contributions can be made and make cash flow adjustments to "find" money to save.
- ✓ **TAX WRITE-OFFS** - Examine adjustments, deductions, and credits on your 2023 tax return to identify strategies to help minimize tax liability in 2024. Examples include: maximizing contributions to retirement savings accounts, Roth IRA conversions, tax loss harvesting, tax-free investments, and strategically timing the receipt of income.
- ✓ **CAPITAL GAINS AND LOSSES** - Review information reported on Schedule D of a tax return to gain insights into the performance of investment holdings. Investors can use this information to determine whether to buy or sell securities and to rebalance their investment portfolio to align with their risk tolerance and long-term objectives.
- ✓ **CHARITABLE GIFTING** - Determine whether you get any tax benefit for donating to charity. Most people do not because they take the standard deduction. You may decide to "bunch" itemized deductions every so often and include philanthropy in your tax planning. Qualified charitable distributions are another tax-advantaged strategy.
- ✓ **TAX CALCULATION** - Follow the numbers line by line. Many people don't really understand how taxes are calculated because they rely on a paid preparer or software. The process is as follows: total income minus adjustments = adjusted gross income (AGI) minus deduction (standard or itemized) = taxable income/tax minus tax credits.



In summary, don't put your 2023 tax return away and forget about it. A tax return can provide valuable insights into your overall financial situation and can help identify future tax and financial planning decisions.

Let's Get Physical: Easy Balance and Flexibility Activities

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Did you know that doing flexibility and balance activities throughout the week can help support healthy bones and joints? It is true! In this article, you will learn the differences between flexibility and balance activities, and easy examples that you can do at home. Before starting any new physical activity, please consult with a healthcare provider regarding recommendations or limitations. Do not continue to perform an activity if you feel any pain or discomfort.



For flexibility activities, there are two main types you can do on your own to support joint health and improve your range of motion: **dynamic stretching** and **static stretching**. To obtain the most benefit from these, you should vary these activities among all muscle groups throughout the week.

Flexibility Activities

Dynamic Stretching

Definition: Making controlled and repetitive movements that allow a full range of motion.

Benefits: Promotes flexibility among multiple muscle groups and increases heart rate before a workout.

Recommendations: Choose a variation of dynamic stretching methods. Best done prior to an exercise routine as a warmup and to increase your heart rate.

Examples: Turning your neck left then right; shrugging your shoulders up and down; rotating your arms in full circles forwards and backwards; forming a fist and expanding your fingers; twisting your torso left then right; rotating your ankle left then right.

Static Stretching

Definition: Holding a movement in the fullest range of motion for at least 30 seconds.

Benefits: Promotes flexibility among a targeted muscle group and improves range of motion.

Recommendations: Choose a variation of static stretching methods. Best done after an exercise routine to cool down and decrease your heart rate.

Examples: Holding your neck while turned to the left then right; stretching and holding your arm over your chest; pull back your fingers on one hand in a full range; while standing, leaning your body to reach your left hand to your left knee then repeating on the other side; reach down to touch your toes, allowing you to stretch your legs.

Balance Activities

Balance activities are a bit more straight-forward than flexibility activities. Balance activities are movements that promote balance to help support bone health, cognitive function, and reaction ability.

Balance Activities

Definition: Distributing your weight that allows you to stand or move without falling.

Benefits: Improves body awareness (proprioception), bone health, and core strength.

Recommendations: Choose a variation of balance activities throughout the week.

Examples: Walking heel-toe in a straight line; stepping over an object; yoga; tai chi.



Setting weekly goals to include both activities in your schedule is a great way to kickstart a new routine. Consider your weekly obligations and identify opportunities you can fit into your routine, just 15-to-20-minutes of these activities a day. It may be helpful to write your goals down and regularly update them to find a system that works for you.

Learn more information and examples of flexibility and balance activities by watching the *Wellness Wednesdays with FCHS Webinar* called "Let's Get Physical: Easy Movements for Balance and Flexibility" presented by Ricardo Kairios. <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/wellness-wednesdays/archive.php?2024-01-lets-get-physical-easy-movements-for-balance-and-flexibility>

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Although fermentation has been around for thousands of years, studies on the effects of fermented foods on the human gut are still in early days. There is a definite lack of studies on fermented non-dairy items. More and more people are becoming interested in fermented foods though. Hopefully over the next few years, we will see more studies and evidence to support their regular intake for overall better health. One thing to remember when consuming fermented products, like sauerkraut and miso, is that they **may be high in sodium**. **Always check labels and include fermented foods as part of a healthy diet**. A little may go a long way with fermented products – enjoy them as a condiment and try different types!

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Weight Loss and Wrestling:

Registered Dietitians Can Help!

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Rueda Flores et al, (2023). To reduce the prevalence of RWL, the NCAA recommends losing no more than 1% of body weight per week (Johnson, 2017). Monitoring the weights athletes on a weekly basis can help coaches to enforce this recommendation.

Providing education on the potential dangers of RWL methods is half the battle. These weight loss strategies have been ingrained in the wrestling community for decades and it is unlikely that it will discontinue anytime soon. A registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) is a healthcare professional who can utilize their extensive knowledge on nutrition to provide guidance to athletes on how to optimize their athletic performance through proper nutrition. RDNs can provide individualized nutrition interventions that can help athletes meet their nutrient needs, maximize muscle maintenance, and minimize health risks. Collaborative intervention between coaches, parents, and an RDN is essential to reduce the prevalence of RWL strategies and promote healthier dietary behaviors amongst wrestlers.

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