This newsletter is produced by the Nutrition Education Network of Washington to enhance communication and coordination among those who educate Washington families about nutrition and food. Energize Newsletter for Nutrition Educators shares brief information about programs and materials that support healthful and enjoyable eating.

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To access past issues, go to https://nutrition.wsu.edu/energize-newsletter/

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Teens Are Drinking Less Soda – Good news: Among US high school students, daily soda consumption decreased significantly from 33.8% in 2007 to 20.5% in 2015. This data comes from a recently published study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which analyzed data from the 2007-2015 national Youth Risk Behavior Surveys. The decline in soda intake was seen across all subgroups: boys and girls, all races and ethnicities, and all socioeconomic levels. Beverages constitute about 20% of teens’ calories, so the nutritional quality of those beverages matter.

Sneaky Substitutes – To help lose weight, dieters can cut calories by switching from regular sodas to their sugar-free counterparts, right? Not necessarily. A research review found that the use of artificial sweeteners doesn’t lead to significant weight loss and actually might contribute to weight gain. In a review of seven clinical trials, aspartame, saccharin, sucralose, and other artificial sweeteners didn’t make much of a difference in Body Mass Index (BMI). The same researchers also reviewed 30 observational studies involving more than 400,000 participants, and found that artificial sweeteners were surprisingly associated with obesity and the health problems associated with it: high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. How can this be? One explanation might be that when drinking sugar-free beverages, individuals feel OK about compensating with other higher-calorie foods. Another yet-unproven claim is that sugar substitutes stimulate the desire for sweet taste, making sugary foods hard to resist. Some scientists are looking into whether the sweeteners alter the way that gut microbes digest food or change the body’s metabolism.

Sugary Drinks Tied to Faster Aging of the Brain – Sugar-sweetened beverages are linked to early signs of Alzheimer’s disease. A recent study used data on more than 4,000 adults, examining their brains with MRI, measuring their memory with psychological tests, and analyzing food-frequency questionnaires to assess their consumption of sugary drinks. On average, the more sugar-sweetened beverages that people consumed, the lower their total brain volume, which is tied to increased risk of Alzheimer’s. Higher consumers of sugary drinks also had lower scores on memory tests. Although the study doesn’t show cause and effect, it’s worth “using your head” about how many cans of soda to drink each day. Compared to people who drank less than one sugary drink a day, those who drank more than two a day had decreased brain volume equivalent to two years of normal aging and lower memory scores equivalent the loss of 11 years.

IN THE MEDIA
Seattle’s Soda Tax – In June, the Seattle City Council voted to approve a “soda tax,” with the aim of decreasing the consumption of pop and other sugar-sweetened beverages. The rate will be 1.75 cents per ounce, or about $1.18 for a 2-liter bottle of soda. Sports drinks, energy drinks, and sugar-sweetened fruit drinks also will be taxed. However, baby formula, medicine, weight-loss drinks, and artificially sweetened beverages will not. Beginning January 1, 2018, taxes will be levied on beverage distributors who will pass the added cost on to retailers, who in turn will pass it on to consumers. The idea of taxing sugar isn’t new. A report by Tufts University, https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/03/170301142157.htm, supports the notion that when the cost of sugary drinks and other “unhealthy” foods goes up, sales and consumption go down. Conversely, when the cost of fruits and vegetables goes down, people buy more. For examples with photos of the beverages that will and won’t be taxed in Seattle, see an article in The Stranger

TOOLS OF THE TRADE
Cut Sugar, Cut Calories – Cut Down on Added Sugars outlines the Dietary Guidelines’ recommendations for limiting added sugars, provides examples of sugar-sweetened beverages and foods, and offers tips for healthful substitutions. The two-page downloadable handout, produced by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, emphasizes reducing the intake of calories from added sugars.

Think Your Drink – The Washington State Dairy Council offers an array of teaching tools that compare the added sugar content of various beverages, including sodas, energy drinks, juice, and milk. Updated in 2016, Think Your Drink poster displays bar graphs comparing added sugar and nutrients in soda, energy drink, juice, flavored milk, and more. The Beverage Cards are useful for classroom activities, with 40 separate cards featuring commonly consumed drinks. Each card provides a Nutrition Facts panel, amount of added sugar, and a list of ingredients. Also provided are downloadable lesson plans using the cards in 4th and 5th grade classrooms that align with the new Washington State Health and Physical Education Learning Standards. Although the downloadable Sugar Cube Activity has been around a long time, it’s still a great visual to teach about added sugar. Some resources are free, others can be purchased; Washington and Alaska educators qualify for $25 of free materials.
WASHINGTON GROWN

Fresh This Month – Now that kids have headed back to school, we make a mental shift from summer to fall produce in our kitchens. Swiss chard, kale, mustard greens, and collards are in the family of autumn greens harvested locally in September and October. At farmers’ markets, shoppers can find juicy peaches, plums, nectarines, pluots, and other stone fruits. Melons continue to be in season, as well as a plenty of zucchini and other summer squash. Reference the WA State Department of Agriculture Fruit, Legume and Herbs Seasonality Chart and Vegetable Seasonality Chart for more information on which months locally grown fruits and vegetables are in season in Washington State.

Nutritious Swiss Chard – Chard comes in a rainbow of stem colors that can be red, white, green, and yellow, making good nutrition beautiful on the plate. It’s especially rich in Vitamin K. A half-cup of cooked chard provides more than three times the daily recommendation for vitamin K for adult women. That’s great news to meet nutritional needs but a caution for people taking blood thinners such as Warfarin who need to keep their daily intake of vitamin K constant day to day. People prone to kidney stones may want to pass on chard since it is high in oxalates. Swiss chard got its name from the country of the botanist who first identified it, although historically it’s been popular throughout Mediterranean countries more than Switzerland. WebMD’s article 9 Healthy Facts about Swiss Chard, http://www.webmd.com/diet/features/swiss-chard-9-healthy-facts#1, includes additional health information and a recipe for a chard and potato frittata. For nutrition facts panel, selection, and storage information for chard, and other tougher greens, see SNAP-Ed Connection’s page.

DID YOU KNOW?
As nutrition educators, we are just as prone to operating on misperceptions as anyone else. That includes incorrect ideas about food shoppers. The Bellevue-based Hartman Group recently shared five common beliefs about shoppers that aren’t true. Here are two from their report, Food Shopping in America 2017:
Myth: Millennials don’t plan their food shopping. Fact: Nine out of ten Millennials actually do plan – the same as in earlier generations – but they do it differently. Instead of list-making and checking flyers for sales, they are more likely to plan around menus, recipes, and budgets.
Myth: When grocery shopping, women like to browse but men prefer to search and retrieve. Fact: While this is partly true, it’s mainly because women tend to be the household’s main shoppers, but men are “auxiliary” shoppers. No matter what gender, main shoppers do browse, consider sales, and have an idea of what’s already in the fridge and cupboard. Auxiliary shoppers are more likely to shop for specific items and are less likely to browse.

EAT TOGETHER EAT BETTER – Family Meals Focus
Because our readers have told us that Family Meals is a hot topic, in the May 2011 issue we began a small section on recent news relating to this topic and our long-standing signature program, Eat Together, Eat Better.

Plan now to promote family meals during Dine-In Day
December 3 is Dine-In Day, an initiative to get as many families as possible across the country to eat together at home. An initiative of the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, many partners have signed on with support, including the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior. This year, Dine-In Day will have a special focus on the financial aspects of family mealtime. The initiative’s website includes a wealth of resources: program ideas, infographics, research, sample social media posts, web resources, recipes and more. It also lists specific suggestions for educators working in extension, high schools, and higher education.

OUR MISSION: The Nutrition Education Network coordinates nutrition education efforts to communicate consistent, positive and relevant messages to increase awareness of healthful and enjoyable eating among low-income families. Energize is one way that the Network shares information and resources to accomplish this mission.

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