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May 2013

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Grilling the Safe Way

Grilling is a common activity in the spring and summer months—in addition to avoiding heating up your house with your stove or oven, grilling is often a good way to get family and friends together for some outdoor fun. With this activity, however, there are dangers. Grill safety is important and should not be overlooked.

Follow these tips to keep your grilling experience from taking a wrong turn.

- Always read your grill's instructions prior to use.
- Never use your grill indoors, and keep it at least 10 feet away from any building or home when in use.
- Make sure the grill is off or the coals are cold when you are finished. Never leave a hot grill unattended.
- If you have a gas grill:
 - Check its tubes for blockage regularly, and clear blockage out prior to use.
 - Make sure hoses are not cracking or brittle, and

- that there are no holes, leaks or sharp bends in them.
- Replace scratched or nicked connectors to avoid gas leakage.
- Keep gas hoses as far away from hot surfaces and hot grease as possible.
- Regularly check for gas leaks, per the grill's instruction manual.

Take extra safety precautions when grilling to ensure a fun, accident-free experience.



National Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month

May is National Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month. From dust mites to molds to cockroaches and other household pests, many things can trigger allergies. And with spring in full swing, seasonal asthma and allergies are on their way, too. If you suspect that you are allergic to something, your doctor can perform some simple tests to pinpoint the allergy, and suggest ways to reduce your exposure. If you have a severe allergy, make sure friends, family and co-workers know and are aware of what to do in case of a serious reaction.

DID YOU KNOW

Asthma and allergies are often overlooked, but in reality, they affect one in five (60 million) Americans.



Healthier Alternatives to Common Unhealthy Foods

Think you can't live without certain indulgent treats and snacks? Think again. Check out these common foods, and their healthier alternatives:

- **Ice cream:** sorbet, sherbet, frozen yogurt
- **Donuts, sweet rolls, muffins or pastries:** English muffins, bagels or scones
- **Chips:** popcorn (air- or microwave-popped) or baked or kettle chips
- **Mayonnaise on sandwiches:** avocado
- **Bacon:** turkey bacon
- **Protein or candy bars:** almonds or peanuts
- **Creamy salad dressings:** olive oil- or vinegar-based dressings

- **Hamburgers:** turkey burgers, bean burgers, veggie burgers
- **Potatoes:** sweet potatoes



Affordable Décor Refresh

From cleaning out closets to getting the yard ready for summer, spring is a time of change. If you've been itching to redecorate your home, but putting it off because you can't afford it, check out these simple ways to save money and give your décor a lift.

Skip the interior decorator. There are many free and inexpensive ways to get ideas and learn how to take on home improvement projects. Use the Internet and magazines to get an idea of what appeals to you. You'll save money, and will likely end up with a style that complements your personality.

Determine what you want to spend. If you go into a redecorating project with an idea of what you're willing to spend, you will be less likely to blow your budget on one item. Tell yourself you can spend a certain amount of money on each item or room, and stick to it.

Take advantage of what you already have. Realize that you can repurpose things and give them new appeal with a little do-it-yourself creativity. That wooden crate collecting dust in the corner, filled with your adult daughter's old toys doesn't necessarily have to go. Sand it, paint it and turn it on its side to serve as a rustic end table.

Don't think big-name stores are the only option. From thrift shops to craft fairs to garage sales, there are many ways to get exactly what you want without overspending. While shopping takes time and patience, you are likely to find what you want at a lower price than if you bought from a big-name store.

Grilled Vegetable Kabobs

When you fire up the grill this spring, meat isn't the only option—grilled vegetables are delicious and good for you, too. Try this recipe for grilled vegetable kabobs and start your spring the healthy way.

- 2 medium zucchini
- 2 medium yellow squash
- 2 red or green bell peppers, seeded
- 2 medium red onions
- 16 cherry tomatoes
- 8 oz. fresh mushrooms
- 2 medium ears sweet corn
- Nonstick vegetable oil spray
- ½ c. balsamic vinegar
- 2 tbsp. mustard
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ tsp. thyme

Rinse all the vegetables. Cut zucchini, squash and bell peppers into 2-inch chunks. Cut red onions into wedges. Combine the cut vegetables with the tomatoes and mushrooms in a bowl. Cut the corn into 1-inch pieces and cook in boiling water for about 10 minutes. Add cooked corn to other vegetables. Mix the vinegar, mustard, garlic and thyme for the sauce. Toss vegetables in the sauce and thread vegetables onto skewers. Before starting the grill, spray it with vegetable oil spray. Place the skewers on the grill over medium heat. Baste occasionally with extra sauce. Grill 20 minutes, or until tender.



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Allergies: The Basics

Allergies are negative reactions that occur as a result of coming into contact with a normally harmless substance. These substances, or allergens, can be inhaled, injected, ingested or even simply touched to cause reactions.

Symptoms

Allergy symptoms often go unrecognized. You may falsely believe you have a cold or the flu, when really you are experiencing symptoms of an allergy. While the symptoms are similar, allergies can be differentiated. Common symptoms include sneezing, stuffy nose and itchy, watery eyes.

Risk Factors

Allergies can develop at any age. People who are most susceptible include those under age 40 who have at least one parent with allergies. Allergies can change or disappear over time, while others may recur at the same time each year, lasting for a few weeks or months each time.

Prevention

Allergists can perform skin tests to determine which substances are causing the skin to have adverse reactions. Avoiding those allergens can help

alleviate some symptoms, as can these preventive measures:

- Stay indoors on days when pollen counts are high.
- Keep your home as clean and dust-free as possible.
- Learn about the benefits of a home air purifier.
- Put pillows and mattresses in allergen-proof encasements.
- Use a vacuum cleaner that has double bags or allergen-trapping bags.
- Avoid having dogs and cats in your home if you are allergic to pet dander.
- Choose hardwood floors with washable area rugs rather than wall-to-wall carpeting.

Allergy Treatment

Treatment for most allergies is available both over-the-counter and by prescription. Your doctor may suggest several treatment methods:

- Antihistamine medications work by blocking the effects of histamines, the chemicals that cause many allergy symptoms. Keep in mind that antihistamines may also cause

drowsiness.

- Nasal sprays often help to reduce nasal inflammation, congestion, sneezing and runny nose.
- Decongestants help dry up nasal passages and reduce the swelling that causes stuffiness.

If your allergy symptoms are severe or chronic, you may need a series of allergy shots. Contact your physician or allergist to determine which treatment option is best suited for your particular allergy symptoms.



Did You Know...?

While many allergies are permanent, some can be outgrown, such as soy and dairy allergies. If you think you have outgrown an allergy, have allergy testing done.

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Children's Health: Allergies

An allergy exists when one's immune system responds abnormally to a usually harmless substance. For most affected people, allergies first appear during childhood.

Risk Factors

Though any child may develop allergies, there are factors that increase the risk. Family history plays a large role in a child's tendency to have an allergy. In addition, hormones, stress, smoke and other environmental factors can play a role.

Common Allergies

Common child allergies include:

- *Allergic rhinitis* (commonly known as hay fever) – caused by inhaled pollen or other allergens; can be seasonal or year-round
- *Atopic dermatitis* (eczema) – itchy skin rash
- *Food allergies* – common ones in children are peanuts, eggs and milk. Children sometimes outgrow these allergies.
- *Medications*
- *Insect stings*

Allergic Reactions

Symptoms of an allergic reaction vary by person. For inhaled or skin allergens, common symptoms include:

- Itchy, watery eyes
- Runny nose or sneezing

- Feeling tired or ill
- Rashes or hives

Food or medication allergies can cause cramps, vomiting, swelling in the mouth or throat, itchy skin, wheezing and hives. Insect stings often cause swelling, itching, redness and pain.

The previous examples are the most common allergies and symptoms, but remember that any number of substances can cause allergies, with a large variety of potential symptoms.

Anaphylaxis

The most severe reaction to any allergen is called anaphylaxis. This can occur for any allergy, but children with peanut or insect sting allergies may be particularly vulnerable. Anaphylaxis is a life threatening reaction, with symptoms such as full body hives, difficulty breathing, tingling of the skin and unconsciousness. This type of reaction occurs almost immediately after exposure to the allergen, and requires emergency medical care.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Watch for abnormal symptoms in your child, particularly if they occur after eating or taking medication, after being stung, or when exposed to potential allergens indoors or outdoors. If you suspect your child has an allergy, see a doctor. A doctor can perform skin, blood or other tests to identify the potential allergy.

If your child is diagnosed with an allergy, learn as much as you can about it so that you can adapt your family's lifestyle to avoid allergy triggers. If your child is prone to severe reactions, alert family, friends and your child's school or child care provider, and have your child wear a medical alert bracelet at all times.



Did You Know...?

For those prone to serious allergic reactions, your doctor may prescribe an auto-injector containing epinephrine. It can help reduce severe symptoms if administered immediately after the allergen exposure, but medical attention should still be sought as well.