**Department of Extension Family and Consumer Sciences**

**Quarterly Newsletter**

**January 2014**

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**January is Radon Action Month**

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What is Radon and why should I be concerned? Well, generally, when a potential health issue is designated an Awareness/Action Month there just may be some reason for concern. Radon does not occur in every state but radon levels are detected in many New Mexico counties.

**What is Radon?**

Radon is a naturally occurring gas. You can’t see it, smell it or taste it. The gas results from the breakdown of uranium that is found in nearly all soils. Typically, it is concentrated in areas with lots of granite, shale, phosphates and pitchblende. *Phosphates*, which contain phosphorus, are plant nutrients. They are common substances in the environment and occur naturally in our food, water and our bodies. *Pitchblende*, the most important ore of uranium, is a radioactive material and is the original source of radium. Radon can be found in building material made from concrete or stone.

**How Does Exposure to Radon Occur?**

The United Nation’s World Health Organization (WHO) reports that radon is a worldwide health risk in homes (EPA, 2009). Because it is a gas, radon moves up through the ground and can leak into the home through the basement, crawl space, or foundation. Sometimes radon enters the home through well water. Radon can even be carried into the home through natural gas.

**What are the Health Risks to Radon Exposure?**

Exposure to radon can increase your chances of getting lung cancer. According to the WHO (EPA, 2009), “Radon is the second most important cause of lung cancer after smoking….” If radon particles are present in the air, they can get into your lungs when you breathe. These particles accumulate in the lungs and release bursts of energy. These bursts can damage lung tissue -- leading to lung cancer. Radon exposure is the number one cause of lung cancer among non-smokers. Smoking, combined with radon exposure, is an especially dangerous health risk.

**How Do I Know if Radon is Present?**

The U.S. Surgeon General and EPA recommend that all homes be tested. Testing is the only way to know if you and your family are at risk from radon. You can test your home yourself or hire a professional. Testing is easy and inexpensive.

Do It Yourself

Radon detectors are available to test your home. Radon test kits can be found in some home improvement stores. Follow the directions on the packaging for the proper placement of the device and where to send the device after the test to get your reading.

Radon test kits can be requested by New Mexico residents via the Internet, [www.drhomeair.com](http://www.drhomeair.com) or by phone: 1-800-324-5928.

Hire a Professional

New Mexico provides a complete list of National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) certified radon measurement specialists in each county. Follow this link to access the list, <http://nm-radon.info/NM_neha_by_county.html>

**Additional Resources**

The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) provides the Indoor Radon Outreach Program with information available at <http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/nmrcb/radon.html>

The New Mexico Radon Outreach and Education contact, Michael A. Taylor, can be reached via email: michael.taylor@state.nm.us or by phone: (505) 476-8608.

The National Radon Hotline: 1-800-767-7236 (1-800-SOSRADON)

**What’s on Your Plate?**

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MyPlate was revealed in June 2011 to help Americans choose foods based on the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. While it is an improvement over the typical American diet, there are variations available that may be more appropriate for certain chronic diseases. The *Kitchen Creations* program presents two different tools for plating meals to help people with diabetes learn how to fit the foods they love into a healthy diet focused on balance, variety, and moderation. One is the Diabetes Plate, used with permission from *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat with Diabetes*.

Below is a side-by-side comparison of MyPlate and the Diabetes Plate. MyPlate is intended for the general public but its recommendations often apply to those with chronic diseases as well. The Diabetes Plate helps people with diabetes recognize some important differences in planning meals that will help manage blood sugars.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
| **Vegetables** | **Low-Carbohydrate Vegetables** |
| ***Vary your veggies.*** Raw, cooked, fresh, frozen, canned, dried, dehydrated, whole, cut-cup, mashed, or even 100% vegetable juice all count. MyPlate identifies five subgroups:1. Dark green vegetables
2. Starchy vegetables
3. Red and orange vegetables
4. Beans and peas
5. Other vegetables
 | ***Start by filling half your plate with salad and other low-carbohydrate vegetables.*** Balancing high-carbohydrate foods with low-carbohydrate foods is key to managing blood sugars. Low-carbohydrate vegetables are the best choice. They are low in calories and fat, have protein, and are packed with fiber, vitamins, and minerals. |
| **Protein** | **Protein** |
| ***Go lean with protein.*** Foods made from meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, processed soy products, nuts, and seeds are considered part of this group. Those who do not eat these foods daily may count beans and peas in the Protein Group instead of the Vegetables Group. | ***Divide the other half of your plate in half again for lean protein.*** Fish and poultry are best. Limit red meat, and avoid processed meat. Beans and peas should be counted in the Grains or Starchy Vegetables Group. |
| **Grains** | **Grains or Starchy Vegetables** |
| ***Make at least half your grains whole.*** MyPlate identifies two subgroups:1. Whole grains
2. Refined grains

Whole grains contain the entire grain kernel. The bran and germ are removed from refined grains. This results in a finer texture and longer shelf life but removes dietary fiber, iron, and B vitamins. Vitamins and minerals are added back, but fiber is not. Eating whole grains as part of a balanced diet reduces the risk of several chronic diseases. | ***Most people with diabetes should have three or fewer servings of carbohydrate choices—grains, starchy vegetables, fruit, and dairy—per meal, which go at the top right. One carbohydrate choice contains about 15 grams of carbohydrate.*** Whole grains are better than refined grains. Beans, peas, corn, potatoes, yams, and winter squash are examples of other foods that belong in this group. |
| **Fruit** | **Fruit** |
| ***Focus on fruits.*** Fresh, canned, frozen, dried, whole, cut-up, pureed, or 100% fruit juice all count. Make half your plate fruits and vegetables. | ***Choose the best.*** The best choices are fresh, canned in juice instead of syrup (drain the juice), or frozen. Consider fruit your dessert most of the time. If you are having an occasional dessert, replace one or more of your carbohydrate choices with the desired sweet. |
| **Dairy** | **Dairy** |
| **Get your calcium-rich foods.** Fluid milk and foods made from milk that retain their calcium content are part of this group, as is calcium-fortified soymilk. Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk. | **Keep the calcium.** Foods rich in calcium and vitamin D are important to bone and cardiovascular health. As with MyPlate, fat-free or low-fat options are best when it comes to dairy. However, add healthy fats—monounsaturated and polyunsaturated—in moderation to meals for flavor, satiety, and more stable blood glucose levels.  |

Resources: [ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://choosemyplate.gov/) and [www.diabetesandmindfuleating.com](http://www.diabetesandmindfuleating.com)

**13 Reasons Tea Is Good for You**

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Food & Nutrition Specialist

Ever since 2737 B.C., when Chinese legend says leaves from an overhanging Camellia sinensis plant fell into Emperor Shen Nung's cup of boiling water, tea has been recognized by cultures around the world for its capacity to soothe, restore and refresh. Far from being an apocryphal promise, tea has been lauded for an array of potential health benefits — from reducing cancer and heart disease risk, improving dental health and boosting weight loss.

In December 2013, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* issued a Supplement addressing the research that was presented at the Fifth International Scientific Symposium on Tea and Human Health held on September 19, 2012 at the US Department of Agriculture in Washington DC. The reason for this fifth symposium was based largely on the number of new studies, averaging 400-500 per year published since the fourth symposium was held in 2007.

But before loading up on Red Zinger, make sure that your “tea” is actually tea. Real tea is derived from the plant *Camellia sinensis* and includes only four varieties: green, black, white, and oolong. Anything else, like herbal “tea”, is an infusion of a different plant and isn’t technically tea.

But what real tea lacks in variety, it makes up for in its health benefits. Tea’s health properties can be attributed to polyphenols, a type of antioxidant, and phytochemical. Though most researchers focused on the better-known green and black teas, white and oolong also bring benefits to the table.

1. Tea can improve exercise endurance. Scientists have found that the catechins (antioxidants) in green tea extract increase the body’s ability to burn fat as fuel, which accounts for improved muscle endurance.
2. Drinking tea could help reduce the risk of heart attack. Tea might also help protect against cardiovascular and degenerative diseases.
3. The antioxidants in tea might help protect against many types of cancers, including breast, colon, colorectal, skin, lung, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, pancreas, liver, ovarian, prostrate and oral cancers. But don’t rely solely on tea to keep a healthy body — tea is not a miracle cure, after all. While some studies suggest that tea has cancer-fighting benefits, the current research is mixed.
4. Tea helps fight free radicals. Tea is high in oxygen radical absorbance capacity (“ORAC”), which is a fancy way of saying that it helps destroy free radicals that can damage DNA in the body. While our bodies are designed to fight free radicals on their own, they’re not 100% effective —damage from these radicals has been linked to cancer, heart disease, and neurological degeneration.
5. Tea is hydrating to the body, despite the caffeine!
6. Drinking tea is linked with a lower risk of Parkinson’s disease. When considered with other factors like smoking, physical activity, age, and body mass index, regular tea drinking was associated with a lowered risk of Parkinson’s disease in both men and women.
7. Tea might provide protection from ultraviolet rays. We know it’s important to limit exposure to UV rays. The good news is that green tea may act as a back-up sunscreen.
8. Tea could keep waist circumference in check. In one study, participants who regularly consumed hot tea had lower waist circumference and lower BMI than non-consuming participants. Scientists speculate that regular tea drinking lowers the risk of metabolic syndrome, which increases the risk of diabetes, artery disease and stroke. Although it’s important to remember that correlation does not equal causation.
9. Regular tea drinking might also counteract some of the negative effects of smoking and might even lessen the risk of lung cancer. Good news, obviously, but not a justification for smoking.
10. Tea could be beneficial to people with Type 2 diabetes. Studies suggest that compounds in green tea could help diabetics better process glucose.
11. Tea can help the body recover from radiation. One study found that tea helped protect against cellular degeneration upon exposure to radiation, while another found that tea can help skin bounce back following exposure.
12. Green tea has been found to improve bone mineral density and strength.
13. Tea might be an effective agent in the prevention and treatment of neurological diseases, especially degenerative diseases like Alzheimer’s. While many factors influence brain health, polyphenols in green tea may help maintain the parts of the brain that regulate learning and memory.

Though most research on tea is highly positive, it’s not all definitive — so keep these caveats in mind before stocking up on gallons of the stuff:

1. Keep it cool. Repeatedly drinking hot beverages may boost the risk of esophageal cancer. Give tea several minutes to cool off before sipping.
2. The studies seem convincing, but a rat does not a human make. Chemicals in tea may react differently in the lab than they do in the human body. Tannins, and the other good stuff in green tea, may not be bioavailable for humans, meaning tea might not always benefit human health to the same degree as in lab studies suggest.
3. All tea drinks are not created equal. The body’s access to the good stuff in tea might be determined by the tea variety, by the way it was processed, and by the way it was brewed.

The takeaway: at the very least, tea should be safe to consume — just not in excessive amounts. So brew up a pot — hot or cold — and enjoy.

**How Extension Personnel can Utilize Google Analytics for Reporting**

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Google Analytics provides data of website visitors that can be very useful if utilized in a correct manner. Designed with businesses in mind, Google Analytics can still be beneficial for non-business organizations like Extension. The goals of this article are to explain the importance of including Google Analytics in Extension programming, and to share ways of utilizing Google Analytics for Extension programs.

For people who are not familiar with Google Analytics, it is an online tracking service that provides data and statistics on your websites and their visitors. Data obtained from Google Analytics are very rich, which includes number of visitors, their demographics, time in the day (and night) when people visit your website, keywords search used to enter your website, geographical location from where your visitors accessed your site, and how long people stayed on your website. A full listing of metrics available may be obtained from Google Analytics website.

Before going further into Google Analytics, there are a few clarifications. There are actually various other website tracking or analytics services to obtain visitor data. Other analytic programs include *Clicky*, *GoSquared*, *Woopra*, and *ShinyStat*. Since Google Analytics is by far the mostly used, we will stick to Google Analytics.

**Google Analytics Setup**

In order to obtain data from Google Analytics, we need to first include Google Analytics web tracking code program to permit or enable Google Analytics to collect data on your website visitors. This can be done by anyone with basic website knowledge. If you work in organizations with IT personnel like universities, you can ask IT personnel to set up your websites and online materials so that Google Analytics can track their important metrics.

**Start simple**

If you are unsure about Google Analytics, you should give it a try. A quick way to do so is by testing Google Analytics set up for college websites. If you have a choice, choose sites that have high number of hits such as the college’s website. By playing around with the menu, you should be able to see the metrics and dimensions available for reporting and extension programs.

**Simple Reporting**

Journals usually brag about their number of subscriptions to imply the number of people their journals would reach out to. As more publications are getting placed online, Google Analytics provides the ideal platform to see visitors who have landed on your online resources such as your newsletters. In this way, you will be able to obtain visitor information specific to your article, as opposed to printed journal subscription.

Starting simple with Google Analytics also covers starting simple in reporting metrics such as number of visitors to your website and top website visited last year.

Table 1: Google Analytics Results for selected NMSU FRM Extension How-To Guide Publications, 2010

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Title | Page-views  | Unique Page-views | Average Time of Page | Bounce Rate  |
| G-204: Right to Cancel: Telephone Sales | 126 | 120 | 0:02:38 | 85.71% |
| G-205: Don't Be Robbed by Fraud | 245 | 236 | 0:02:45 | 90.48% |
| G-216: You Can Check Your Credit Rating | 202 | 183 | 0:01:17 | 45.62% |
| G-220: Write Checks the Right Way | 155 | 147 | 0:00:00 | 95.33% |
| G-224:Unfair Trade Practices Act | 145 | 137 | 0:00:58 | 91.67% |
| G-229: Organize a Home Filing System | 101 | 90 | 0:00:00 | 69.22% |
| G-235: Fair Debt Collection Practices Act | 114 | 107 | 0:01:26 | 56.03% |
| G-246: Information to Help Your Heirs | 269 | 263 | 0:02:29 | 91.67% |
| G-247: Things to do Before Making a Will | 2,122 | 2,035 | 0:04:28 | 95.54% |
| G-259: Smart Shopping | 182 | 171 | 0:02:57 | 78.95% |
| G-412: Designing a Hobby Center | 4,633 | 4,299 | 0:06:27 | 83.33% |
| … | … | … | … | … |
| Total | 13,394 | 11,888 | 0:05:07 | 81.34% |

**Setting Your Goals**

One of the main ways businesses are using Google Analytics is by looking into top sites that lead to sales and positive behaviors towards brand loyalty. The positive behaviors could be playing videos related to the company and following the company’s social media accounts (E.g. Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook). Since the focus of Extension is not to seek profit, other goals in Extension program may include enrollment in programs and personal savings actually accumulated. The important thing here, like many of your Extension programs, is to set goals for your website. From there, hopefully, you can design ways to evaluate the effectiveness of your website in reaching your goals. With these goals, you can actually measure knowledge and behavior change rate, known in Google Analytics as *Conversion Rate*.

Figure 1 below shows a simplistic funnel describing traffic from NMSU America Saves (AS) Project webpage. From the figure, we could figure out the effectiveness of that particular website in influencing its visitors to enroll in the saving program. One can observe that thirty percent of visitors who landed on that page actually signed up for the savings program. A more complicated funnel system with funnels of various websites provides more insights on underperforming websites with regards to your website goals. If you see your webpage on motivations for savings are not leading to an acceptable conversion rate (e.g. 3% visitor to this page enrolled in the savings program), you may need to alter the content of that page.

Figure 1: How a Google Analytics Funnel May Be Utilized to See a Page Performance in Reaching a Website’s Goal

Website on NMSU America Saves (AS) Project [1]

6,053

Online (AS) Savings Program Enrollment Page

4,871

Entered from sites other than [1]

3,055

Entrance

6,053

Exit

4,237

Exit

4,672

Thank You for Enrolling Page

199

**1,816 (30%)**

Proceeded to AS Enrollment Page

**199 (4.1%)**

Enrolled in the Savings Program

**Not-So-Basic Applications**

Beyond the aggregate numbers, there are other metrics and activities that you can manipulate to get enriched information. Some of these applications are:

1. Segmentation: More advanced Google Analytics users would want to segment the aggregate numbers. This enables users to get richer insights on websites visitors and their behaviors. In fact, an expert on Google Analytics remarked that aggregate Google Analytics numbers are useless (Kaushik, 2013). For instance, the visitor numbers may very well include number of people who merely stumbled on the page although they intended to search for other resources with similar keywords.
2. Automatize your monthly report: Automatizing your monthly or weekly report is a great way to get a personalized report without having to spend too much time. You can set up a template report containing your interested metrics. Monthly report will allow you to see some trends, search keywords that led to your site, website visitor trend changes as a response to your programs, and other metrics of interest.
3. Use the Google Analytics data to further improve your site: Demographic and keyword data may provide insights on how your sites have improved and ways to improve your websites. If your sites designed for youth are being accessed mainly by older Americans, you may be doing something wrong. For instance, Google Analytics may spit out data on low smartphone visitors, indicating your websites may not be smartphone- or table-format friendly which would turn off younger visitors.

**Conclusion**

For many extension personnel, reporting season may have just ended. However, **this is the best time to install Google Analytics** so that you may harvest the data when it comes to the annual reporting season. The Google Analytics properties mentioned are just the very basics of Google Analytics and how it is very applicable to Extension works, especially in evaluation reporting. As Null (2013) it, “you’re a fool if you don’t include Google Analytics” in your websites.

**Reference**

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