No matter how technologically advanced society becomes, it’s hard to imagine a time when reading and writing would no longer be essential. Yet, according to the latest study by the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), 52 percent of Americans age 16 and older have basic or below-basic reading skills. That translates to more than half of all adult Americans reading at or below a fifth grade level, just over the global literacy rate of 49 percent.

Despite so much emphasis in recent years on leaving no child behind, literacy rates continue to drop. How can this be happening in an industrialized nation and, more importantly, what can we do about it? Compared to nations with higher literacy rates, most U.S. curricula begin formally teaching reading earlier, before many children are ready. Further, preschoolers who are pushed to read tend to have fewer nursery rhyme, music and movement experiences. It is vital to ensure that we find ways to provide these and important to continue to read to and read with even older children.

Another related issue is the difficulty discriminating and manipulating speech sounds resulting from recurrent ear infections. These phonological processing problems are by far the most common cause of reading disabilities. In fact, relatively few people with dyslexia have visual processing problems. There are also inherited conditions that disrupt key reading and writing prerequisite skills. When bright children struggle with reading acquisition, it is usually a function of some breakdown in cognitive processing. If this is the case, early detection is critical. Therapies can sometimes strengthen weak pathways, and multisensory remedial programs, usually Orton-Gillingham-based, can be implemented to bypass them.

Some good resources for enhancing literacy include:
- Reading is Fundamental (RIF) – rif.org
- Barton – bartonreading.com
- “Teaching a Struggling Reader” and “Dog on a Log” books by Pamela Brookes.

YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program: Lose weight, gain health and reduce your risk for developing type 2 diabetes. Join this year-long lifestyle change program. Groups meet one time per week for 16 weeks, then monthly for continued support. To register, call 379-2473.

Evidence-Based Programs: The Aging Well Center is honored to host evidence-based programs that offer proven ways through defined research to promote wellness and manage or reduce health concerns and/or falls. Class size is limited. The center sincerely appreciates several partners and funders who help to provide the evidence-based programs, including Senior Citizens Services, Inc., Area Agency on Aging of Pasco-Pinellas, Older Americans Act Title III D, YMCA of the Suncoast and Pinellas County Social Action Funding. Contact the Aging Well Center at 724-3070 to inquire about future classes.

Fitness with Christina: Personal trainer Christina is available to schedule Fitness Orientation and/or Fitness Consultation and follow-up. With the orientation, learn how to operate all of the equipment in one of our recreation centers. Fitness consultations provide an initial consultation and 30-minute follow-up session to learn a basic routine to follow on your own. For more information and pricing, call 686-9599.
LEARN:

FREE PROGRAMS UNLESS SPECIFIED

SHINE One-on-One Medicare Counseling: Nov. 4 and 18 at Countryside Library (2642 Sabal Springs Drive) and Nov. 25 at the Main Library (100 N. Osceola Ave.) from 10:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. SHINE is a free program offered by the Florida Department of Elder Affairs and your local Area Agency on Aging. Specially-trained volunteers can assist with Medicare, Medicaid and health insurance questions by providing one-on-one counseling and information. Services are free, unbiased and confidential. Register at myclearwaterlibrary.librarymarket.com.

New Joint Replacement Options:
Wednesday, Nov. 6 (noon) at the Aging Well Center at the Long Center, 1501 N. Belcher Road. Join us to discuss the latest advances in surgical joint replacement to treat painful hip and knee conditions. Aaron Koslin, D.O., Orthopedic Surgeon, will lead this presentation. For more information and to register, call 253-4076.

WORK:

NOVEMBER IS NATIONAL DIABETES MONTH

Diabetes is prevalent nationwide, meaning most employers see diabetes as one of the more common chronic conditions in their population. It is also likely a big reason behind many of the high cost drivers in claims data, either on its own, or as occurring alongside another chronic condition.

There are many ways employers can support diabetes education and management within the workplace:

- Provide an environment that makes well being the easy and accessible choice. This type of environment occurs best within a culture that prioritizes health and empowerment and provides employees the resources they need to be successful with their well-being. It could be a CEO showing support for wellness, testimonials on how other employees have turned their health around, the ability to participate in activities on company time, an onsite wellness center and so much more.

- Check your benefits to see if diabetes education is covered under your plan. Several insurance companies are either covering services or providing their own prevention program.

- Bring diabetes education onsite. The YMCA of the Suncoast and Baycare Health System both have resources on diabetes prevention, education and management. Along with your carrier, you may be able to bring some affordable, high quality, programs and support to your employees right at the office. Talk about support and accessibility.

For more information on diabetes, visit the American Diabetes Association at diabetes.org.
What is Your Why

Tips from the Trainer:

WHAT IS YOUR WHY?

What is your WHY? So often we are advised to do this or that and it sounds good at the time, but then we never follow through. We find that making a change in our life is difficult. We like routine and continuity; it takes more work to veer off our path and make a change. Sometimes we require an external motivator to help us make that change. Unfortunately for most people, winning prizes such as money, gift certificates or rebates aren’t sufficient enough external motivators to create lasting change.

This leads us back to the question, “What is your why?” If we stop and think, each one of us has at least one “why” that will drive us to make a lasting change. What will help us create the change that allows us to make better choices to create a healthier us? Those choices can include eating better, exercising more or taking stretch breaks from sitting. A library of good information and well-meaning “gurus” will never be able to create a lasting change in us until we decide why we are willing to try.

Whatever the reason, whether it is a doctor’s advice, a parent who died young from heart disease, the desire to be around for your children and grandchildren, continuous fatigue, unending aches and pain or simply wanting to take up a new sport, you must determine what your why is. Why is it worth veering off your path and making one small change? Only when that is determined, will you be on the road to true and permanent change. Don’t try to change everything. Just pick one thing you KNOW you can be successful with. Being healthier starts with making that first healthier choice. Only that first step can lead to the next step. So, take a minute and figure out, what is your why?

Jeanmarie Scordino M.Ed., FAFS
Exercise Physiologist
HEALTHY RECIPES:

SWEET POTATO PIE WITH SPICED CREAM TOPPING

Yield: 12 servings
Nutrition Facts: Serving size - 1 wedge: 287 calories, 9.5 g total fat, (4.5 g saturated fat), 49 mg cholesterol, 254 mg sodium, 43.6 g total carbohydrate, 1.8 g fiber, 6 g protein
Source: Cooking Light, November 2011

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 pounds sweet potatoes
- 1/3 cup fat-free milk
- 1 (14-ounce) can fat-free sweetened condensed milk, divided
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- 3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon, divided
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 (14.1-ounce) package refrigerated pie dough
- Cooking spray
- 1/2 cup (4 ounces) 1/3-less fat cream cheese, softened

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Wrap potatoes in aluminum foil. Bake potatoes at 350 degrees for 1 1/2 hours or until tender and then discard foil. Let stand 10 minutes; peel. Place flesh in a large bowl; discard skins. Mash flesh with fork. Stir in fat-free milk, 1/4 cup sweetened condensed milk, sugar, butter, 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon, vanilla, and salt. Stir in eggs.
3. Fit dough into a 9 1/2-inch pie plate coated with cooking spray. Press dough against bottom and sides of pan. Fold edges under, and flute. Spoon sweet potato mixture into prepared crust. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes or until set.
4. Place the remaining 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon and cream cheese in a medium bowl. Beat with an electric mixer until combined. Add a 1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons sweetened condensed milk to cheese mixture; reserve remaining milk for another use. Beat at medium speed until well blended. Carefully pour cream mixture evenly over pie. Let stand 10 minutes. Cut into wedges.

BROWNED BUTTER GNOCCHI WITH BROCCOLI AND NUTS

Yield: 6 servings
Nutrition Facts: Per Serving: 368 calories, 12.8 g total fat (3.8 g saturated fat), 7.9 g protein, 56.6 g carbohydrate, 5.7 g dietary fiber
Source: Cooking Light, January 2013

Ingredients

- 2 (16-ounce) packages prepared gnocchi
- 5 cups chopped broccoli florets
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons pine nuts, toasted
- 1.5 ounces shaved fresh pecorino Romano cheese (about 1/3 cup)

Directions

1. Cook gnocchi in a large Dutch oven according to package directions. Add broccoli during last minute of cooking; cook 1 minute. Drain.
2. Heat a large skillet over medium heat. Add butter and oil; cook 7 minutes or until butter browns. Add gnocchi mixture and pepper to pan; toss to coat. Spoon about 1 1/2 cups gnocchi mixture into each of 6 shallow bowls. Sprinkle each serving with 1/2 teaspoons pine nuts and about 2 teaspoons cheese.

Healthy Choices For a Healthy Clearwater is published each month by the city of Clearwater to encourage community wellness by highlighting healthy ways to Live, Learn, Work and Play. Send your questions, comments, or suggestions about this newsletter to regina.novak@myclearwater.com.