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UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI
M Extension
Live. And Learn.

Kindred *Spirits*

Practice accident prevention

Keeping children safe

Stay safe driving

When you get drowsy behind the wheel, do you play it safe?

Here's a list of the most common tactics people take to help them stay alert while driving:

- 54% pull the car over and walk around,
- 52% listen to music,
- 45% drink coffee,
- 35% talk with a passenger or to themselves,
- 18% park the car and take a nap,
- 16% turn on the air conditioner,
- 14% use nicotine,
- 13% drive slower and
- 5% drive faster.

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When you read the headlines, it might seem that the biggest threats to both a child's safety and well-being are abduction, sexual abuse or childhood cancer. "However, the odds of your child being affected by any of those issues are very slim," says Diana Milne, University of Missouri Extension human development specialist.

Actually, the biggest threats to younger children are mundane activities such as taking a bath, riding in a car, biking or skateboarding and swimming, according to the Centers for Disease Control. A recent article in the *Work & Family Life* newsletter stated that about 4,000 children, ages 1 to 14 die each year as a result of unintended injuries. This includes auto accidents, drowning, burn injuries, pedestrian accidents, suffocation and poisoning.

While rare, when crimes such as abduction or sexual abuse do occur. More often than not, it is a family member or acquaintance—not a stranger who is the perpetrator. The most likely victims of stranger abduction are preteen or teen girls; often they've met the perpetrator on-line.

When it comes to physical assault, the most common crimes

against kids are assaults by other kids, including siblings. A vital skill for kids to learn is non-violent response to disagreements.

Many accidents can be prevented by putting into practice good safety habits, such as:

- Enforcing car-seat use for young children and seatbelt use for others.
- Asking children to ride in the back seat until at least age 10—it's safer.
- Make sure kids always wear a helmet when riding bikes, skateboarding or skiing.

Let's not forget about safety practices for our teens. By far, teenagers are at greatest risk when behind the wheel. The crash rate for 16- to 19-year-olds is four times that of older drivers. That's why states have instituted graduated licensing laws that promote safe and responsible driving. Consider drawing up a contract for your teen driver, with guidelines for hours, destinations, number of passengers, etc. If rules are broken, you must be willing to follow through with adequate consequences.

Developing practices to prevent accidents before they happen is time well spent, says Milne.

Choose dark chocolate

The treat that contains healthful flavonoids

Recent research shows that eating a small amount of dark chocolate daily is good for you, says Susan Mills-Gray, University of Missouri Extension nutrition specialist.

Dark chocolate has a high-cocoa content. Cocoa contains epicatechin, which is a member of a group of compounds called plant flavonoids.

Flavonoids are known to:

- Keep cholesterol from gathering in blood vessels,
- Reduce the risk of blood clots,

- Slow the immune responses that lead to clogged arteries and
- Lower blood pressure.

Standard chocolate manufacturing destroys up to half of the flavonoids. But chocolate companies have now learned to make dark chocolate that keeps up to 95 percent of its flavonoids.

Dark chocolate contains more flavonoids than many other foods, including green tea, black tea, red wine and blueberries.

Dark chocolate also contains potent antioxidants. Antioxidants destroy destructive molecules that can contribute to both heart disease and cancer.

“While a little dark chocolate is good, a lot is not better,” says the nutrition specialist. “Dark chocolate is still loaded with calories. If you’re going to eat more chocolate, you’ll have to cut calories back somewhere else.”

Most of the research is based on the consumption of 1.6 ounces of dark chocolate per day. This is equivalent to five bite-size Hershey’s dark chocolates.

Mills-Gray says, “Don’t replace healthy foods with chocolate; most of our diets have plenty of sweets.

“But if chocolate is your daily treat, then consider switching to dark chocolate for a health boost.”

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February is heart month

Heart disease is not just a man’s problem. Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women, regardless of their race or ethnicity. One of every three women dies of heart disease compared to 1 in 30 deaths from breast cancer.

“The symptoms women experience during a heart attack often differ from men,” says Saralee Jamieson, MU Extension human environmental sciences specialist. “Thus heart attacks in women can be misdiagnosed.”

Heart disease doesn’t just result in death. The condition also can damage your heart—and your life. It can creep up on you and result in prolonged illness and lower your quality of life. If heart disease isn’t treated, it can lead to serious complications.

Be prepared, learn the symptoms of a heart attack and seek immediate medical attention if you begin experiencing any of them.