



Family Matters

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A Family Newsletter prepared by Iowa State University Extension Family Specialists

Are you getting ahead?

“Getting ahead” financially is a goal shared by most people. People want to be better off today than they were last year and better off tomorrow than they are today. To find out if you are “getting ahead,” make a **net worth statement** every year.

A **net worth statement** provides a snapshot of your financial situation at a given point in time. It is simply a listing of your assets’ monetary value, along with the amount of your debts or other liabilities. When you calculate assets minus liabilities, the resulting value is your net worth.

Decide what to include in assets. All financial accounts would normally be included, but you may or may not decide to list the value of all property. A common recommendation is to leave out any personal property that you are not likely to sell. It is rarely worth the effort of valuing all personal property – clothing, most furniture, general household items.

When listing assets, two basic rules apply: 1) avoid overstating your net worth by overvaluing property assets; and 2) try not to make too much work for yourself – keep it simple. Most of us get a good picture of our current financial status by simply listing financial accounts and, when relevant, real estate value.

There is no “right” level of net worth, but there is certainly a “*right*” direction to be moving. In general, you’ll want your net worth to increase each year, with only two common exceptions: 1) while you are in college, your net worth may decrease as you use savings and build debt; 2) after you retire, your net worth will typically decrease from year to year, as you use your retirement savings for the purpose they were intended!

Evaluating a net worth statement

- Compare your current status with previous years.
Example: If your total credit card debt was \$1,000 a year ago and is now \$2,000, that increase could signal a spending problem. For most people, credit

card debt of \$2,000 is not a disaster, but increasing debt by \$1,000/year for several years could add up to a major problem. Looking at net worth annually can help you catch such a trend before it becomes serious.

- Evaluate your short-term financial security. Do you have savings or liquid investments for use in an emergency? Is your debt load low enough so that you could borrow additional money needed?
- Evaluate your progress toward long-term security. Are you saving for retirement or other future needs?
- Celebrate your accomplishments. If you have been working all year to increase savings or reduce debt and your net worth statement shows that you have - give yourself a pat on the back. It’s important to recognize your accomplishment.
- Set goals for the coming year. Use your net worth statement to determine financial goals. Then make a plan. Follow it. A year from now you will see the results when you do your net worth statement.

Retirement readiness

Find out if your retirement savings are on track to meet your needs by using a simple, non-commercial tool. The Ballpark E\$timate of Retirement Savings Needs is an easy-to-use, two-page worksheet that helps you quickly identify approximately how much you need to save to fund a comfortable retirement. To get a paper copy, in either English or Spanish, go to the website below or contact your local ISU Extension office.

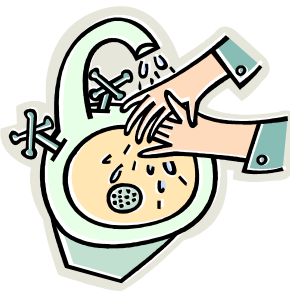
The on-line interactive version of the Ballpark E\$timate enables users to fine-tune their projections for their own situations even more closely than the paper worksheet. Although there are many web-based calculators for retirement savings, most are commercial and may be tied to advertising. The Ballpark E\$timate was developed by the non-profit American Savings Education Council.

www.choosetosave.org/ballpark/

Myths of hand washing

Myth 1: *Antimicrobial soap is necessary.*

Studies have shown that ordinary soap (those without antimicrobial components) work just as well at preventing bacteria and germ transmission as antimicrobial soap products.



Myth 2: *Hand sanitizers are as good as washing.*

Hand sanitizers do not work on soiled hands and are ineffective against NOROVIRUS, the leading cause of gastroenteritis in the United States. Washing with soap and water is your best bet for clean hands.

Prepared by Paulelda Gilbert,
ISU Extension Health and Nutrition Field Specialist

Does USDA Organic seal on food package mean more nutritional food?

USDA makes no claims that organically produced food is safer or more nutritious than conventionally produced food. Organic food differs from conventionally produced food in the way it is grown, handled, and processed.

Organic meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones. Organic food is produced without using most conventional pesticides; fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge; bioengineering; or ionizing radiation.

Before a product can be labeled “organic,” a Government approved certifier inspects the farm where the food is grown to make sure the farmer is following all the rules necessary to meet USDA organic standards. The USDA Organic seal tells you that a product is at least 95 percent organic. Companies that handle or process organic food before it gets to your local supermarket or restaurant must also be certified.

Energy drinks: gain or lose?

Energy drink claims are certainly enticing - from Redbull’s “power to give you wings” to Arizona Green Tea Energy Drink’s “explosive caffeine energy” and Enviga’s “invigorate your metabolism.” There is no denying that the energy drink market is growing, however, the one caveat is that the health claims in this beverage category are currently not regulated by the FDA. With a public hungry for quick energy and easy weight loss potions, these beverages promise a magical solution. But weight loss is never that simple.

Take a close look at Enviga, at \$1.29 to \$1.49 per can. It is a carbonated green tea beverage and contains the same amount of caffeine as a cup of coffee (100 mg per 12 oz. can) plus 200 mg of calcium. Enviga’s so-called superior calorie burning properties are primarily rooted in green tea’s antioxidant called epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG)-with 90 mg per can.

EGCG is purported to speed up metabolism and promote fat burning. Thus, the claim is that drinking 3 cans a day would result in burning an additional 60 to 100 calories a day. Each 12 oz. can contains 5 calories. A concern is that this product is sending consumers the wrong message about weight loss.



The 100 calorie burn is rather insignificant in the weight loss scheme.

The bottom line:

Why not just drink plain brewed green tea? It is virtually calorie free, costs less and may have other health benefits, too. The USDA reports that an 8 oz. cup of fresh brewed green tea contains 196 mg of EGCG; bottled green tea has 9 mg.

Source: Communicating Food for Health, April 2007
Prepared by Jan Temple, Nutrition Field Specialist, Iowa

Geriatric assessment tool valuable for well-being of elderly

A geriatric assessment can give aging persons and their caregivers valuable assistance to making decisions about independence and safety. A complete geriatric assessment is a comprehensive review of a person's mental, physical, environmental, social and financial condition, and can give valuable assistance in making care giving decisions.

Consider an assessment when:

- Contemplating relocation options.
- Pain, depression, dizziness, incontinence or memory loss are present.
- There are problems with daily living or activities instrumental to daily living.
- There is serious memory problems or behavioral changes.
- Or ailments that seem to have no cause.

A plan, created from assessment results, can lead to a better quality of life, greater independence, and lower medical issues and costs. Learn more about geriatric assessments by contacting the primary care providers or checking with the Area Agency for Aging.

Adapted from Family Information Services, May 2004.

Negotiating the step-parent role

Celebrating Mother's Day and Father's Day can be anything but a celebration for step-parents. Jeanette Lofas, *Stepfamily Foundation* president and founder, suggests that biological parents and step-parents decide on "rules of the house" as soon as possible.



"This is not easy," said Lofas. "You may need to start with both parents making separate lists and then comparing them. Through discussion you will need to compromise. Rules about discipline, chores,

manners, and meals must be worked out as a partnership or they will not work."

Then hold a family meeting where the biological parent presents the rules. The kids may have some input, but no veto. Post the "rules of this house" on the refrigerator. Set and share consequences for not following the rules, and rewards for following them. Consistently follow through. Kids really do appreciate having rules.

If the biological parent has part-time custody, remember, you don't have to be there all of the time. The kids need time alone with their other biological parent.

If negotiating the rule list is too difficult, seek the help of a licensed therapist who has experience working with stepfamilies. Don't give up. Keep your sense of humor. There will be occasions to celebrate.

Power struggles take two

Nearly every parent gets into power struggles with their child. Remember these tips to reduce the energy wasted on power struggles in your home.

The only behavior you can control is your own! When your child becomes defiant, calmly leave the room and request that she let you know when ready to comply. By simply changing your response, you break the power struggle and regain your own self-control.

Where there is a winner, there is a loser. If raising a loser is not part of your long-term vision as a parent, look for a win-win solution. Try a solution you both can live with, thus empowering your child and teaching a lesson in working together.

The opposite of control is cooperation. Offering choices reduces power struggles as it gives children some control.

Put the power struggles behind you. Stay focused on what you will do - not what you will (try) to make your child do!

Adapted from Family Information Services Jan. 2004
Sparkling Teeth Instead of Battle Sparks.