

BACK TO BUSINESS IOWA PODCAST

A partnership of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and America's SBDC Iowa

SEASON 1 | EPISODE 40: Wellness During COVID-19

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Description: *Join host Steve Adams as he speaks to wellness experts from the Human Sciences Department of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Clinical psychologist David Brown and registered dietician Jody Gatewood speak about strategies to improve wellness during COVID-19, ranging from diet and exercise suggestions to caring for your mental health.*



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Steve Adams, host 00:10

Hello, and welcome to the Back to Business Iowa podcast from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. This podcast is a collaboration between Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and the programs including Community and Economic Development, Farm, Food and Enterprise Development, and the Iowa Small Business Development Centers. These podcasts cover relevant topics for businesses and individuals related to education, research and technical assistance during and post COVID-19.

Steve Adams, host 00:54

I'm Steve Adams, field specialist three at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, part of the Community and Economic Development unit and as you know, your host for these podcasts. Today we'll be talking about how to combat stress caused by the pandemic with health and wellness experts David Brown and Jody Gatewood from the human sciences department of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. First of all, thank you both for being here today.

Jody Gatewood 01:22

Yeah, I'm looking forward to it.

David Brown 01:24

Thanks for inviting us.

Steve Adams, host 01:26

David, let's start with you. Can you tell us a little bit about the human sciences department?

David Brown 01:33

Yeah, sure. Human sciences extension and outreach that I am a part of focuses on family life now. That can include early childhood education, childcare, parenting relationships, caregiving, aging, and now behavioral health. So the area has a pretty broad focus.

Steve Adams, host 01:55

So what is your background and what is the focus of your work with Iowa State Extension?

David Brown 02:00

Well, professionally, I'm a licensed marital and family therapist and I've worked clinically in a hospital agency and in a variety of military settings. But I also have 11 years' experience with ISU extension in a

variety of positions. Right now, as the behavioral health state specialist, my focus is on helping, supporting and leading behavioral health-related education program and initiatives across Iowa.

Steve Adams, host 02:26

So I imagine some of that focus has changed due to the outbreak of COVID-19, and how so? How has it changed?

David Brown 02:33

Well, I'm not sure that the focus has changed, but certainly what has changed is that the way that we are providing programs, because right now we're providing almost all of our programs virtually versus face to face. I also think there's kind of a sense of urgency regarding programming and how we're doing programming due to the need out there right now.

Steve Adams, host 03:00

Well, Jody, kind of the same question for you. What's your background and what's your focus of work with ISU extension?

Jody Gatewood 03:06

Yeah, I have my masters of nutritional sciences here from Iowa State University, and I've been with extension for about 10 years. I'm also a registered dietitian. And so my work focuses on nutrition programs, and specifically nutrition programs for people with limited incomes, so people that might qualify for food assistance. And so I hope to lead that and support the programming that we do across the state for, again, families with limited incomes.

Jody Gatewood 03:34

We also have a website and some other online resources called Spend smart, eat smart. So we have an app, we do a blog, social media, so really just trying to get that information out there about how to eat well, but also be able to do that within a budget. And I also hope to lead some of our programming related to well-being and so we have a program called What About Me? My Wellbeing that our human sciences specialists deliver, our county partners help to deliver, and so helping to educate and provide resources related to financial well-being, social-emotional well-being as well as physical well-being.

Steve Adams, host 04:12

Well, again, I know, with all the things you just mentioned that that had to change your focus a little bit as well. So in what ways have you changed because of the pandemic?

Jody Gatewood 04:23

Yeah, as David said, you know, we're doing virtual programming. And so when you're used to doing you know, in person, especially with nutrition programs, we teach a lot about cooking and some different cooking skills. So that's definitely a little more challenging where we're doing virtual education. But we're still trying to connect with our participants, you know, through phone calls, through Zoom sessions. And so just still trying to stay connected, because we do know that right now, our participants are needing the education and the support that we can provide. Lots of people are, you know, doing a lot more cooking than they maybe have had to do in the past when they're not able to or feel comfortable going out to eat.

Jody Gatewood 05:02

Having to maybe adjust what they are making; we know at the beginning of the pandemic, you know, getting some of the foods that we were used to became a little bit more challenging. We've also been doing more on social media, and our focus on the blogs also changed. So, you know, we were talking about or had planned to talk about, you know, traveling, and how do you well when you're on the road.

And so I'm just really making sure that we're providing relevant content to what people are experiencing right now.

Steve Adams, host 05:30

Well I know my wife has commented several times over the last few months, she's tired of eating her own cooking. So yeah, I imagine a lot of people are spending more time at home cooking. So Jody, if you had to provide a connection between wellness, exercise and nutrition, what would you say those connections were?

Jody Gatewood 05:50

Yeah, so again, with our What About Me? My Wellbeing program, we help people think about and reflect on their well-being in the area of three different areas. So we think about financial well-being, social-emotional, and physical well-being, and they all affect us, they affect our well-being and our health. And so nutrition and exercise are a part of that physical well-being. And you know, they affect our bodies, and you know, how well we're feeling.

Jody Gatewood 06:19

Another part of that physical well-being is sleep. And so we know that, you know, what we eat, how much movement we get, that all really helps, you know, determine how well we're going to be, you know, thinking about our immune system, you know, with COVID-19, they've done a lot of talking about, you know, people that are at higher risk. And so helping to reduce those risks, and maybe prevent some of those conditions is affected by nutrition and exercise.

Jody Gatewood 06:48

And I think the thing to also remember is how much the different areas of well-being affect each other. So again, if people are financially stressed, you know, that really is going to affect their physical health. And so you know, if they can get a little bit of movement into their day, that is gonna help to maybe relieve a little bit of that stress, and just making sure that we're still nourishing our bodies to help us, you know, fight any infections and just stay well.

Steve Adams, host 07:16

Yeah, I think I would have lost my mind at this point, if I hadn't gone out for a daily walk, just to kind of take my mind away from things for a while. So, David, there remains I know, a stigma about mental health and what it means to seek help or treatment in this country. And it can be hard to know how to distinguish the difference between just a general malaise and a clinical depression, especially if you've never experienced that before, because we're living through these kind of complicated times, and everybody is suffering and kind of different ways. Could you describe some symptoms that may help a person determine whether they might need to seek professional help?

David Brown 07:57

Yeah, sure, Steve. You know, all of us have days that we're feeling a little bit more down. And you know, maybe the next day, we feel better after a good night's sleep or after doing something fun, like maybe having a date with our partner. But we start to become concerned when kind of the depressed or down mood continues for a two-week period or more. You know, maybe the person doesn't enjoy activities that they used to, maybe they are sleeping too much or too little, you know, a person could start having difficulty concentrating. There may also be a significant weight gain or weight loss. Now, obviously, we should be most concerned if the person has continued, has thoughts of worthlessness or recurrent thoughts of death. Now, those are some really key signs that a person might benefit from professional assistance.

Steve Adams, host 08:49

I just happened to read an article this morning that talked about people are developing COVID nightmares. Have you heard anything about that?

David Brown 09:01

I have not heard anything about that, but it doesn't surprise me because, you know, this is really a traumatic situation and we hear about COVID every day. And so it doesn't surprise me that people are having some type of nightmares or flashbacks regarding that.

Steve Adams, host 09:17

Yeah, the article was kind of stating that just like you said that, you know, the daily bombardment is starting to creep into the subconscious a little bit and causing people restlessness, especially while they're sleeping. So, I happen to see though, on your department's website that you've got a very comprehensive list of resources available to people who may be struggling with wellness. Can you tell us a little bit about what those resources are that are available to all Iowans?

David Brown 09:47

Sure, you know, many of our resources right now are focused on helping people learn more about the signs and symptoms of, you know, any type of mental health concern or even suicidal ideation and how anyone can help them out with those issues. So the two key programs we're providing are mental health first aid and question-persuade-refer. Mental health first aid—and we're doing both of these programs virtually—but mental health first aid teaches our participants how to help someone who's developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis.

David Brown 10:22

The question-persuade-refer, those individual trained in that program learn how to recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis, then they learn how to question, persuade, and refer them to help. So those are our key virtual programs, we're focusing on maybe helping others to be more aware of some of the signs and symptoms that maybe others around them, friends, family members, may be experiencing.

David Brown 10:50

I also do want to mention a couple other programs. COVID Recovery Iowa, which ISU Extension and Outreach plays a large role, offers free virtual counseling to all Iowans impacted by COVID. And of course, Iowa Concern Hotline at 515-447-1985 provides confidential stress counseling and resource and referral services 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And those are all really great resources that individuals may need to be aware of.

Steve Adams, host 11:21

Jody, I see there's a lot of talk about the upcoming winter season, you know, flu will be upon us before we know it. And then of course, we've got COVID hanging around. And people are talking about how difficult this is going to be due to the pandemic. Are you thinking that this winter will be particularly challenging for collective health and wellness?

Jody Gatewood 11:44

Yeah, you know, when winter rolls around, we tend to you know, enjoy a lot of those comfort foods, maybe a little bit higher in fat, sugar and salt. You know, maybe not getting as much physical activity, especially with less sunlight, and it being so cold here, we kind of do our own hibernating, I guess, maybe. And so I think it's just important, you know, for people to remember and think about how they might still be able to get in some movement.

Jody Gatewood 12:12

I just can't stress enough how much, you know, it doesn't, you don't have to be a runner or, you know, doing anything real strenuous. It's just about getting in some movement. So you know, getting in a walk, or, you know, there's lots of great online resources, different videos that you might be able to follow to help get some movement into your day. And so I really would encourage people, you know, to think about that and do a little planning.

Jody Gatewood 12:38

A University of Michigan study found that just 20 minutes outdoors can help drop cortisol levels in adults by over 20%. And so when we think about cortisol, we call that the stress hormone. And so I know it's cold out, but I think about, you know, how people might be able to, you know, just bundle up and go out for that, you know, 20-minute walk to help, you know, really kind of boost their moods. You know, think about doing it in the middle of the day when there is sunlight, so that they, you know, can get out there and maybe have that help to boost their mood.

Jody Gatewood 13:09

And I think as far as nutrition, you know, I think it's okay to enjoy those comfort foods, I know, you know, stress can really affect your appetite, we do have cravings for those higher fat, sugary foods, that also can increase our appetite. But just you know, be mindful and think about planning ahead. So you know, you might have that dessert, but just being able to balance it out then with, you know, some fruits and vegetables and some whole grains, lean protein. So I encourage people to plan ahead and just really think about, you know, how they might make changes or, you know, things that they can do this winter to help keep improving and just maintaining their health.

Steve Adams, host 13:53

I've got a stationary bicycle trainer I set up during the winter, and you know, I can just, I can still go ahead and work but, you know, take that 20 minutes. I mean, you're right, you can bundle up. I mean, winter hasn't killed us in Iowa for hundreds and hundreds of years so you can bundle up and get out for that walk. But I think that is important. Do you have specific resources that our listeners might need to be aware of related to exercise and nutrition?

Jody Gatewood 14:20

Yeah, so as I mentioned before, we have a great online suite of resources called Spend smart, eat smart. And so people can Google it, and it will come up. Otherwise, it's SpendSmart.extension.iastate.edu is the website. There's also an app for both Apple and Android phones. It's a free app. And so we have lots of different recipes, you know, low-cost, high-nutrition recipes. We also have a couple of physical activity videos. They're just 15 to 20 minutes long. So again, just something that you can do in the comfort of your home.

Jody Gatewood 14:56

And so I would encourage people to look into Spend smart, eat smart in the resources that it might be able to help people, as you mentioned, your wife maybe was kind of sick of her own cooking. So I also think, you know, just finding some different recipes, some different things to try. I know we all get kind of used to making the same thing. So I think people might be able to find some new recipes that might help make it a little bit more enjoyable to be in the kitchen and do some other cooking.

Steve Adams, host 15:24

Yeah, keep it new, as I always say. So David, and Jodi, I really want to thank you for your time today, it was very informative. And for folks that want additional information and resources, those can all be found if you go to [www.extension.iastate.edu/human sciences/](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/human%20sciences/). So David, if someone wanted to get ahold of you to ask about anything you've said today, what would be the best way to do that?

David Brown 15:56

No, they can certainly feel free to email me at dmbrown@iastate.edu or give me a phone call at 515-294-0860.

Steve Adams, host 16:08

Great, David. Hey, Jody, same question for you.

Jody Gatewood 16:11

Yeah, they can reach me through email at jodyg@iastate.edu or also my phone, 515-294-4691.

Steve Adams, host 16:25

Human sciences does so much for lowans and I certainly would encourage all of you to take advantage of the resources that are out there. And David, Jody, this has been a super pleasure for me and thanks so much for being with us here today.

Jody Gatewood 16:39

Yeah, thanks for thanks for having us.

Steve Adams, host 16:42

As you can imagine, these podcasts are not possible without a little help from my friends, as I like to say. I'd like to personally thank my producers, Brian Tapp of the Farm, Food and Enterprise Development unit, and Brett Middendorf, who's on loan to us from the Iowa SBDC, along with our media marketing gurus, Susan Erickson and Sandy Oberbroekling from Community and Economic Development, Leigh Adcock at Farm, Food and Enterprise Development, and Brianna Hall of the Iowa SBDC. Thanks to all you folks who do all this work behind the scenes.

Steve Adams, host 17:16

Well, if you have any questions about this Back to Business Iowa podcast, please feel free to contact me, Steve Adams, at stadams@iastate.edu. And as always, thanks for listening. If you've enjoyed listening to this podcast, please consider posting a review on Stitcher, Spotify, Castbox, the Podcast app, Apple, Google, or on whatever platform you find your podcasts. Reviews, ratings and comments will all help us to build a better podcast. So whether it's a one star or a five star review, we value your input and opinion. Thanks so much for doing that.

Steve Adams, host 17:57

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