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Weather Old Wives Tales

There are so many predictions of weather, so many old wives tales. I thought I had heard them all, but then I heard some new ones. Let us take a look at some of those.

Rain is on the way because cows are lying down. In that case, it must rain every day at my house! There is no scientific evidence that this is true.

My elbow is hurting, so it is going to get cold! While it is true that colder weather can trigger joint pain, what is not true is the tale that the pain will be long lasting or that it will lead to a lifetime of joint problems. We do know the weather can affect our health. A Swiss study found an increase in heart attack risk in winter and a decrease in summer. This is because systolic blood pressure levels tend to be lower in the summer. Cold, dry air sucks moisture out of the skin, which makes the skin more vulnerable to things like psoriasis. Rainy days can make arthritis flare, due to atmospheric drops. Some suggest people have more migraine headaches when it is lightning, perhaps due to electromagnetic changes.

There are those that think the wooliness of a caterpillar can predict the severity of winter weather. There is no scientific evidence that this is the case. Then there are those that think the wider the middle brown section on the “wooly worm” the milder the winter. The curator of insects at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, during the 1940’s and 50’s conducted a survey for 10 years. He found this to be 80% accurate. Of course, there is criticism over the size of his sampling.

Persimmon prediction. According to folklore, believed to originate in the Ozarks, you can predict the coming winter weather by slicing a persimmon seed in half. If you see a spoon shape, there will be a lot of heavy wet snow to scoop. A fork shape means light, powdery snow and a milder winter. If you see a knife, you can expect to be “cut” by cold, icy, windy weather. The Jefferson County, Missouri, Extension office has studied this method for the past 17 year, checking the seeds and then the winter weather. The seeds have been accurate 13 out of 17 years.

Red sky at morning, sailor’s take warning: Red sky at nights, sailor’s delight. Dating back 2000 years, this tale was used to detect storm systems. This old wives tale is more widely trusted than most because it is uncannily accurate. This one actually has some scientific explanation. It relates to moving high and low surface-pressure weather systems and the way colors in sunlight are scattered differently by dirty and clean atmospheres.

The next one is squirrely, because you have to watch what the little city rats are doing. If they are building their nests low in the trees, this would indicate a bad, cold and blistering winter. This one sounds a little “nutty”.

Another one, that is new to me, if you hear thunder or see lightning in the winter, snow will fall in a week. Thunder during the winter, does imply a strong/active weather pattern. This tale seems to be hit or miss. You could get snow or rain or nothing! I am voting for nothing.

Cindy Williams
Meadowlark Extension District
Food, Nutrition, Health and Safety

Handling a Recalled Food

Food recalls happen almost daily and many do not get a lot of publicity. In a majority of recalls, it is the manufacturer that issues a voluntary recall.

Manufacturers will work with the FDA or USDA to help determine the reason for the recall and to fix the issue. If foodborne illnesses have occurred, the CDC and state health departments will also be involved.

As consumers, it is important to pay attention to recalls to eliminate the chance of getting sick. Recall announcements give specific information about the food recall including the type of food, brand, package size, date codes, manufacturer codes, shelf life dates, distribution locations, and other pertinent information.

If you have a recalled food, take it back to where it was purchased for a refund, or throw it away. Do not take the chance of eating it or feeding it to animals.

Avoid Slips, Trips, and Falls During Winter Weather

As the winter months are upon us, we caution everyone to take extra care to avoid slips, trips, and falls as you are on your feet at home, on the job, or out and about. Following are a few tips to avoid a potential fall:

If you notice a hazard, act:

- *Stay alert for uneven surfaces
- *If moving between vehicles, watch for curbs and potholes
- *If the temperature is close to freezing, assume there is ice; slow down and take short strides
- *Wear appropriate slip-resistant shoes for the environment and the weather
- *Use extra caution in parking lots, sidewalks and drives at work and at home

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Family Life

Know the Risks: E-Cigarettes and Young People

About 4.9 million middle and high school students used tobacco products in 2018. This increase—driven by a surge in e-cigarette use—erased past progress in reducing youth tobacco product use, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

E-cigarettes are devices that heat a liquid into an aerosol that the user inhales. The liquid usually has nicotine and flavoring in it, and other additives.

The following questions and answers are shared in *Talk with Your Teen About E-cigarettes: A Tip Sheet for Parents*. You can get credible information about e-cigarettes and young people at <https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov>.

“Why don’t you want me to use e-cigarettes?” Science shows that e-cigarettes contain ingredients that are addictive and could harm different parts of your body. Right now, your brain is still developing, which means you are more vulnerable to addiction. Many e-cigarettes contain nicotine, and using nicotine can change your brain to make you crave more nicotine. It can also affect your memory and concentration.

E-cigarettes contain chemicals that are harmful. When people use e-cigarettes, they breathe in tiny particles that can harm their lungs. The cloud that people exhale from e-cigarettes can expose you to chemicals that are not safe to breathe.

“What’s the big deal about nicotine?” Your brain is still developing until about age 25. The Surgeon General reported that nicotine is addictive and can harm your brain development. Using nicotine at your age may make it harder for you to concentrate, learn, or control your impulses. Nicotine can even train your brain to be more easily addicted to other drugs.

“Are e-cigarettes safer than conventional cigarettes?” Because your brain is still developing, scientific studies show that it isn’t safe for you to use any tobacco product that contains nicotine, including e-cigarettes. Whether you get nicotine from an e-cigarette or a cigarette, it is still risky. Some e-cigarettes batteries have even exploded and hurt people.