By Susan Newman, Ph.D.

In this age of texting and constant cell phone contact, we sometimes hear about adult children and their parents, mothers and daughters in particular, who are “BFFs.” Being a “Best Friend Forever” with Mom or Dad may not be every adult child’s cup of tea, but most of us do want to have a congenial relationship with our parents.

In conducting research for two books, I spoke with more than 300 adult children and their parents, and I was surprised by how many of them said they would prefer to relate to each other more as peers and less as parent-child. Adult children expressed concern that their parents would not be around forever, and they wanted to have a better, stronger, friendlier relationship with them now.

I’m convinced that we can become friends with our parents—even the most difficult ones. But first we have to accept that they are human beings, with flaws and virtues, weaknesses and strengths. We have to start seeing them as people like everyone else, and less like the parents they once were. That’s the key to gaining more equal footing.

We may also need to change some of the ways we relate to each other, and this takes some extra effort on everyone’s part. But I can promise you one thing: the process of working your way through old conflicts and becoming “good,” “better” or even “best friends” with your parents is a forward movement that’s enormously rewarding.

Keep your expectations realistic

Along the way, some aspects of a parenting relationship will probably never change. Somehow, they can do or say things that will throw us off balance. And no matter how old, how independent, or how successful we are, we still want their approval. Their opinions matter to us. So try to be philosophical and think of it this way: Mom and Dad will always be my biggest fans and my toughest critics.

In your adult years, as you move to more of a friendship-based relationship, it helps to have realistic expecta-
“Friending”...
Continued from page 1...

accept your parents as

Discover and share mu

Be thoughtful and inclu

Let go of the old stuff.

When you think about it, we

have all lost friends over the years

for one reason or another. But this

particular friendship, that we have

the power to develop with our

own parents, will very likely sur

vive even the strongest disagree

ment—and as time goes by, it will

grow even closer.

Make some new rules

You may already get along well

with your parents or perhaps

your relationship has been a little

bumpy. Whatever the specific cir

cumstances have been, you can

find new ways to connect. Your re

lationship may evolve into a warm,

intimate friendship or something

lighter, more casual. And just as

it is with our peer friendships, it

can’t be entirely one-sided. Every

body has to make an effort.

Here are some groundrules to

help you and your parents become

supportive, loving allies.

Let go of the old stuff.

Try to forget the mistakes your

parents made when you were

growing up. It can be easier to

blame them for your shortcom

ings than to admit that you made

mistakes too, and that you are ac

countable for your own behavior

and disappointments. Look at it

this way: when a friend you value

upsets or hurts you, you forgive

the person or at least tuck the in

cident away, so you can preserve

what you have together.

This goes in the other di

rection as well. You may need to

remind your parents that you are

no longer the impossible teenager

who almost drove them crazy

years ago. Avoid slipping back

into old parent-child roles. Treat

each other like the grownups you

are now.

More links to a path of friendship

Bring your parents to your job so they

can see where you work and meet your

coworkers.

Coach a parent on using a new smartphone

app you know she or he would enjoy.

Introduce your parents to your friends.

Eat out together. Experience a new cuisine.

Teach them a game they’ve never played.

Tell them about your favorite author or

comedian.

Take your parents to a concert or local

theater performance.

Get involved in a community project

together.

Start a new family tradition with the

grandchildren.

Plan a fun weekend trip together.

Challenge a parent to a round of golf or

hand of gin rummy.

Go bike riding or for a walk together.

Rise above pettiness. An

insensitive remark about a meal

you prepared or a complaint about your

holiday plans can be annoying,

but life is too short to make a

federal case out of every little in

cident. If something truly hurtful

happens, address the issue promptly.

Tell your parents why you’re upset, and ask them to do the same

if they were offended by something you said or did to them.

Accept your parents as

they are. Some older people

especially are unable to talk com

fortably about their feelings. Like

many adult children, Rebecca

wishes she and her mother could

get closer. But her mom is just not

wired that way, so their conversa

tions are about more superficial

matters such as cooking and shop

ping.

“We’re close because I’m her

only daughter and I have daughters

of my own,” Rebecca says, “not be

cause we confide in each other and

share our feelings.”

Draw clear boundaries. The

intimacy, encouragement, nur

turing and support that were

crucial while you were growing up

can be beneficial in adulthood as

well. But adult children can also

feel “smothered” if their parents do

not respect their privacy.

It’s okay to give limited an

swers to a parent’s questions and

say “no” to an inappropriate de

mand. If that doesn’t work, you

may need to say (nicely!) that

you don’t want to do what your

parent is asking or provide the
detailed information he or she

wants to know. Sometimes an

“Oh Dad, let’s not go there” can
do the trick.

Whatever works, it’s impor

tant to let parents know where

you stand. But this runs both ways

too. For example, parents may not

wish to discuss their finances, and

they too have a right to draw that

line with an adult child.

Stay connected. We all like

to feel appreciated and have our

efforts acknowledged. To satisfy

this desire on our parents’ part,

adult children need to stay in touch.

Even highly independent

parents want to be remembered

and included in small but mean

ingful ways. And like it or not,

the “ball” or momentum of the

relationship is almost always in

the adult child’s court.

Clarify your time constraints.

Schedule visits. Make phone calls and send e-mail consistently to fill

in the gaps between visits. Set up “texting” on all your cell phones, so

you can get each other’s attention when you need it. It’s okay to
delay your response to a text mes

sage that arrives at an inconvenient
time or to send a quick few-word

response. But don’t ignore it.

Discover and share mu

tual interests. As you look

beyond your child/parent roles,
you can find new things to enjoy.

Common interests in sports, gar

dening or politics can support, sta

bilize and enrich your friendship.

Move toward a balanced give

and-take in your relationship, with

adult children and parents both
taking the lead at different times

as the “expert” on a subject. “I get
great advice from Mom and I use

Lynn. “And she’ll call me about a

real estate client she doesn’t know

how to handle.”

Be thoughtful and inclu

sive. It’s not only what you do

together that counts, it’s how you

think about and respect each other.

And with so many elements and so

much history at work, intangibles

often become the ties that bind an

adult child-and-parent friendship:

how sensitive you are to each oth

er, how well you listen, and your

willingness to suspend judgment.

These are the very same traits we

value in friends our own age. And

like our other friendships, they’re

always a work in progress, fluid

and changing.

—Adapted from the author’s

books “Nobody’s Baby Now”

(Walker) and “Under One Roof

Again” (Lyons Press). Visit www.
susannewmanphd.com.
Last year’s holiday party was a disaster...

Q I totally embarrassed myself at last year’s office holiday party. Drank too much, wore the wrong dress. What’s the best I can do this time around to show my boss I’m not that girl?

—J.P., Philadelphia

A Holiday parties are famous for exactly what you describe, and much worse. So you’re not alone. Business etiquette expert Barbara Pachter says to view the holiday party as you would any other work-related event: it’s not a time to let it all hang out! She suggests:

- **Dress appropriately.** It may be a party, but it’s still business. Nothing too short, too low, too tight or too anything.
- **Stay sober.** This time, set a limit for yourself before you go. Or order a drink you don’t care for and sip it slowly all night. As you know, it’s easy to lose control if you’ve had too much to drink.
- **Mingle.** Talk to people you know and people you don’t know.
- **Check your body language.** Even if you’re not enjoying yourself, it’s bad manners to show that you’re bored. Don’t frown, slouch, cross, yawn or stand in a corner with your arms crossed.
- **Resist the urge** to say anything negative about the party on your social media sites. No posting of unflattering photos of coworkers on Facebook or tweeting about someone’s unbecoming dress.

Ivan Miser, Ph.D., founder of the networking group BNI.com, goes a step further. He suggests preparing yourself as you would for any otherwork-related activity. Know who you’re talking to, what their job role is, and use the party as an opportunity to make a good impression.

‘‘Introduce yourself to execs but remember it’s still a party,’’ Miser says. ‘‘Don’t act as if you’re giving a board room presentation. Keep it natural and leave them intrigued.’’

Four ideas to jump-start your creativity

I f conventional approaches to finding inspiration, such as brainstorming, have left you cold, you may want to rethink your routine. Here are some surprising new ideas based on recent research that may help light your creative fires.

1 **If you feel sleepy** If you’re a “morning person,” try writing your novel at night. While it’s true that alertness is essential to solving tough problems and creative tasks require big and non-specific thinking, there’s something to be said for letting your mind wander, according to a study reported in the journal *Thinking and Reasoning*. Feeling sleepy can help you make random connections that might jump-start a great idea.

2 **Don’t shy away from arguments** A little head-butting often leads to new thinking. It can force you to think outside the box. “Instead of feeling pressure of stress, recognize the potential in making sense of contradictions,” according to Harvard University negotiation expert Francesca Gino.

3 **Plan ahead** Sounds lame, perhaps, but inspiration does not typically strike spontaneously. A study from the Technical University of Crete in Greece has found that improving time management can boost your creativity. Setting aside a block of specific “creative time” in the day can help you carve out a space where your ideas can flourish, writes study coauthor Leonidas Zampetakis.

4 **Have a bit of background noise** A study reported in the *Journal of Consumer Research* suggests that a little noise can actually enhance creativity. No one is suggesting blasting the TV. That’s too much noise, and it impairs your ability to process information. To promote abstract thinking, you need just the right amount of distraction—say, about the volume level you might find in a café.

—Adapted from *Psychology Today*

Toddlers safer going down slide by themselves

A study at Winthrop University Hospital in New York found that nearly 14 percent of pediatric leg fractures over an 11-month period involved toddlers riding down a slide with a parent or other adult. The fracture may not be apparent right away. Typically the child appeared to be in pain and couldn’t put weight on the leg.

This is a situation where kids are safer by themselves. If a foot gets caught while they’re sliding alone, they can just stop moving or twist around until it comes free. But if they’re sitting in a lap, the force of the adult’s weight is behind them. Orthopedic surgeon Edward Holt of Anne Arundel Medical Center in Annapolis doesn’t want parents to stop taking their kids to the playground or even playing on slides too. He just wants to spread the word about this risk. Check out the video “sliding board fracture prevention” on You Tube featuring Dr. Holt.

—Adapted from *The New York Times*
Give older relatives a chance to do all they can do

Once a week Jan brings food and cooks dinner for her mother after work. “Mom’s done so much for me,” she says. “I feel good doing things for her.” But doing things for an older person may not be the best form of help, especially if it means taking over a task the older person does routinely. Instead of cooking for her mother, it might be better if Jan and her mom made their meal together and went out for a walk after dinner.

When an older relative’s ability to handle everyday activities starts to decline, the natural response is to take over some of those tasks. And the “let me do it for you” approach was once supported by the medical establishment, but that thinking has changed as a result of a large and growing body of research in areas of health and aging.

Older people really do want more responsibility

Completing as many of one’s own daily activities as possible is important for maintaining both physical and mental health. Studies by Rockefeller Foundation President Judith Rodin, Ph.D., when she was at Yale, have shown that even very frail older people are healthier and happier when they have responsibility for their own lives.

People who feel as if they’re mastering their own environment are more likely to continue living independently than are those who may have the same abilities but, for one reason or another, do not feel like they are capable.

Gerontologist Janet K. Belsky, Ph.D., author of The Psychology of Aging, has found that a condition of actual physical deterioration, which she refers to as “excess disability,” is often the result of the following situations:

- When older people who have fallen or have experienced a medical scare choose to restrict their own abilities because they fear a repeat incident.
- When the disabling side effects of medication are mistakenly accepted as the inevitable deterioration of “old age.”

The ‘use it or lose it’ phenomenon

Often, when older people curtail some of their activities, they begin to lose abilities in other areas as well. For example, when joints don’t move much over a period of time, shoulders and hips start to freeze up. Then motion becomes even more limited and the loss spreads to other joints and muscles.

But there is a way to avoid this loss of motion. It’s through regular exercise. Many studies have demonstrated the benefits of even doing routine housework and walking every day.

Generational differences

People who are now in their late 80s and 90s lived through the Great Depression and were taught to keep a stiff upper lip. For many older people, “suffering in silence” is a sign of good character. This can be baffling to Boomer-generation children who prefer to “let it all hang out” and “share” their pain.

Many older people hate to ask for help or to say how they feel because they don’t want to worry their children, says family advocate Mary Pipher, author of Another Country: Navigating the Emotional Terrain of Our Elders.

Older people don’t want to be perceived as weak or ill because they’re afraid their relationship with their children will change.

But if we can acknowledge our differences, the generations can learn from each other, says Pipher. Older people can teach the young about resilience and humor in times of trouble, and boomers can help their parents become more comfortable about expressing their needs and feelings. And both older people and their adult children can work on becoming more active physically.

‘Go4Life’ DVD & Guide

Scientists and doctors have collaborated to provide tips for older people who want to take steps toward a more active lifestyle. To that end, the “Go4Life” campaign by the National Institute of Aging offers excellent, free materials that include its 48-minute “Exercise and Physical Activity” guidebook with accompanying DVD. Just go to the website www.nia.nih.gov and enter the keywords “Go4Life DVD” into the Search window or Google “National Institute of Aging exercise video.”

The “Go4Life” program shows how to start and stick with a safe, effective program of stretching, balance and strength-training exercise. The guidebook also has information about how exercise and proper nutrition are critical for staying healthy as we age.

...and now it’s your turn to ‘stop hovering’

The late humorist Erma Bombeck once wrote a Mother’s Day column that includes the following excellent advice.

“Don’t be in such a hurry to declare Mom’s Day of Dependence. As long as Mom has a mind, let her use it. As long as she has her legs, let her push them to the limit. As long as she has ideas, let her develop them. As long as she has opinions, let her express them. As long as she has purpose, let her be.

“There isn’t a daughter in this world who doesn’t ache to button the top button on her mother’s coat, offer to drive, insist on having the family for Thanksgiving and Christmas, give advice on hemlines, plan her outings, pay for her lunch and put a sweater on her when she isn’t cold.

“Whenever you are tempted to do for Mom what she can still do for herself, just remember…she allowed you to be independent. Now do it for her.”

Here’s something Dad loves doing, and it’s good exercise too.
Yes, our kids really do want us to set limits

By Ron Taffel, Ph.D.

It’s no surprise that one of the most difficult parenting issues today is the problem of setting limits on children’s behavior and privileges. This may sound like an old story, but it is different from the way it used to be.

With the “Greatest Generation,” for example, the force of children rebelling was met with the equally determined voice of adults who were backed up by the neighborhood, kinship systems, churches and community groups around them. Now, parents feel as if they are up against a powerful “second family” made up of kids’ peers and the entire pop culture.

**Kids need and want limits**

It’s true that children who are part of what I call the “free-est generation” often feel free to ignore, free to speak their minds and free to talk their way out of consequences imposed by their parents. But the hundreds of kids and teens I’ve interviewed all repeated over and over that they very much want their parents to set limits.

**How could this be when freedom is such a staple in their lives?**

Because kids need the security of the “family envelope” around them in order for their best selves to feel safe enough to emerge. When they do not feel this protective envelope, they drift to their “second family” for the boundaries, rules, bonding rituals and comfort. This, after all, is what a peer group is all about.

Our children at every age yearn for us to create a safe envelope for them, but they don’t want it in the dictatorial manner previous generations tended to use. Here are some effective ways of enforcing limits that won’t cause family warfare or make you feel like a tyrant.

- **Respect and empathy.** Demanding a degree of respect from kids of all ages protects your child’s emotional well-being. It’s not an old-fashioned idea. Learning that you have feelings and that consequences should be compassionate, creative and fit the crime. But, in truth, we need to keep another key question in mind: Is the consequence enforceable?

- **Curbing freedom of speech at home.** Many post-boomer parents allow kids to say whatever comes to mind. Some believe that their children’s facility with arguments will help them succeed in a competitive world. You can see the glimmer in a parent’s eye when they hear their four year old skillfully negotiating bedtime rules or what to wear to preschool.

- **Just say “yes” to setting a limit.** We’ve all been told that certain lines are not to be crossed gives children a blueprint of interpersonal wisdom.

- **Calmed down? Now teach!** Consequences aren’t always about punishment but about opening up a possibility to teach values. So, after the transgression (10 minutes or a few hours later, when everyone is calmer) is the time for you to get across the message you would like to communicate.

- **Reward genuine effort.** Focus on when your kids are doing right, not just when they’re doing wrong. Parents often take for granted those character-building behaviors they most want their children to learn, and they rarely mention moments of good behavior such as sharing with a sibling, being kind to an older person or being polite to a parent’s friend.

Help your child recognize when he or she is behaving according to expectations. Honest, kindly delivered feedback will demonstrate that you are authentically engaged with your children and that you can perceive when they’re really putting effort in and when they’re not.

Resist the urge to praise automatically (for example, saying “good job” constantly). Praise kids for their efforts—and only when you really mean it. Always remember: praise small, praise quick, praise genuinely. ☉

—Adapted from the author’s book “Childhood Unbound—Saving Our Kids’ Best Selves: Confident Parenting in a World of Change” (Free Press).
When your boss is also your friend

By Anne Perryman

It’s natural for people who work together to become friends socially, and some of us have met our best friends and even our spouses or partners at work. But a personal relationship with a boss can backfire sometimes.

“When I started working for a small family-owned company, the line between my work life and home life got blurred,” says Lila. “My boss started asking me to do things for him—like take care of his cats while he and his wife were away on vacation. It was a bit of a drive for me, but I didn’t feel like I could say no.”

With no guiding rules

Some companies encourage informality between workers and managers. But other employers, particularly in a highly competitive work environment, tend to be less familial. And, of course, employees are more likely to develop friendships with their peers than with their bosses.

Experts have noticed gender differences as well. Women managers like to establish a rapport with the people who report to them rather than taking a strict, “I’m your boss” approach. But there’s still a line between rapport and intimacy—between a workplace friendship and a close personal relationship.

When business is pleasure

The old saying about “not mixing business with pleasure” makes no sense at all in the work world as we know it. Very often, our work is enjoyable, even fun, and mixing work and play can make us more productive.

That said, buddy relationships with bosses can still go sour.

“I had the greatest manager in the world,” says Ron. “We’d work late and go out to eat together. Our families got together socially. Then Ed got a major promotion—on the strength of our mutual efforts, I believe. And to make matters worse, I was left behind to deal with a new manager who didn’t exactly trust me because I had been so friendly with his predecessor.”

Avoiding the pitfalls

A true friendship implies a bond between equals, at least on some level. So while your supervisor may also be your buddy and fun to talk to about your shared interests, he or she still has power over you, at least at the workplace.

Here are some suggestions for ways to avoid the most common pitfalls of a personal relationship with your boss:

- Keep your expectations real. Don’t ask for favors for yourself and don’t expect your boss to make allowances or look the other way if you are lax about your work. No matter how friendly you and your manager are socially, don’t forget that he or she is still your boss.
- Don’t do or say anything that will put your boss in the position of having to choose between organizational performance and his or her friendship with you. It will not reflect well on either of you or bode well for your friendship.

Look at the upside too

This is not to say that you should avoid having a close relationship with your boss. It can be a good experience. You can develop contacts, get a closer view of how management decisions are made and, if you’re lucky, gain a true friend.

As Dr. Adele Scheele writes, “It’s a fact that bosses have favorites, and when the chemistry is right, some turn out to be lasting allies—both inside and outside the office.”

Watch what you say. Something you thought you said in confidence to your supervisor (about another employee perhaps or a touchy situation at work) may come back to haunt you. And be careful about expressing your own opinions on company matters that do not affect you directly. Be a sympathetic listener, but don’t ask for or provide sensitive information.

Give some thought to what your coworkers are saying about your relationship with your manager. Sibling-like rivalry happens at work too. So unless you’re asked, don’t discuss the party you went to together last night. And don’t even think about using your friendship with your boss to get back at a colleague with whom you may be feuding.

If you’re on the ‘boss’ side of the friendship

There are no hard and fast rules for every manager and every workplace. But if you are on the “boss” side of a workplace friendship, ask yourself these questions:

- How involved are you in the personal problems of your employee(s)?
- Do you rely on the people who work for you to help you with your own problems?
- Have your personal needs or the personal needs of your employee(s) become a factor in how your supervise your staff?
- Do you have a close relationship with one employee in particular?
- Are you perceived as playing favorites either by your boss or by the people who report to you?
- Are you consistently fair in your work and task force assignments?
- Are you consistently professional in your email communications with an employee who is also a friend?
- Has anyone suggested that you are partial to an employee with whom you have a friendly relationship?
- Do you talk a lot about what’s going on at work when you spend time socially with your employee who has become a good friend?
- Are you discreet in all of your comments with the person?
- How does the person to whom you report feel about your personal relationships with your employee(s)?
- Has this subject ever been raised?

WFL November 2012  www.workandfamilylife.com
Did you hear the one about...

Food rumors can start from anywhere: a TV show, newspaper or magazine article or word of mouth. Some rumors are backed up by evidence, but many are not. The Nutrition Action Healthletter checks up on a few of the latest crop of food rumors:

**Rumor** Don’t bother taking calcium or vitamin D. Earlier this year, The New York Times reported a study by scientists on the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force with the headline “healthy women advised not to take calcium and vitamin D to prevent fractures.” The article was based on research with healthy women who had taken up to 1,000 milligrams of calcium and 400 IU of vitamin D daily for several years.

**Real Story** To prevent fractures, we need to shoot for a little higher RDA. Our bodies need calcium and vitamin D for strong bones, and most adults do not get enough from food and food supplements. The current RDA is 1,200 mg of calcium daily and 600 IUs of vitamin D daily up to age 70 and 800 IU over age 70.

**Rumor** Eating more fiber will help you eat less. The message that “fiber can help satisfy your appetite and manage your weight” can be found on the Fiber One 90 Calorie Chocolate Fudge Brownies box.

**Real Story** Don’t assume that foods with added processed fiber will help you eat less and keep weight off. It may be true that people who eat fiber-rich fruits, vegetables and beans manage to stay leaner, but that doesn’t mean the fiber was responsible. No scientific studies thus far have produced evidence to support the fiber claim.

“The FDA should not allow claims for satiety just because companies put fiber into products,” says Joanne Slavin, a fiber expert at the University of Minnesota. “It’s much more complicated than that.”

**Rumor** Cutting back on salt is useless or dangerous. This was based on a New York Times article headlined “Salt, We Misjudged You.” The author, freelance writer Gary Taubes, charged that many studies have failed to prove the connection between eating too much salt, hypertension and stroke. He suggested that reducing sodium may do more harm than good.

**Real Story** This article got immediate blow-back from doctors, researchers and health experts. One of the studies Taubes cited was of people on a extremely low-sodium diet, which is atypical for most Americans. And much of what he wrote was based on opinion rather than evidence. The bottom line is that most of us consume too much salt, especially from processed and fast-food sources. Many long-term studies have found that reducing salt lowers one’s risk of heart attacks and strokes.

—Adapted from Consumer Reports on Health

**Did you hear the one about coffee?**

Over the years, experts have warned that too much coffee could harm your health and shorten your life. But new research that took into account other health-related characteristics (like smoking, alcohol use, and physical activity) has shown that people who regularly drink coffee live a little longer.

The New England Journal of Medicine (May 2012) reported this and other findings of the National Institutes of Health–AARP Diet and Health Study that examined 402,260 adults, ages 50 to 71, starting in 1995. The participants were free of heart disease, cancer and stroke when the study began.

It’s important to remember that caffeine is a drug that may interfere with or enhance the effects of other drugs such as some estrogens and antibiotics.

How coffee is brewed can make a health difference too. The two potentially harmful chemicals in coffee (caffestol and kahweol) remain in espresso, French press and boiled coffee but are removed when coffee is prepared through a filter.

—Adapted from The New York Times

**Here’s some good news for coffee drinkers**

The study was preliminary, short-term and inconclusive. The best long-term studies show that people lose (and keep off) as much weight on high-carb diets as they do on low-carb diets. The message is: Don’t just lift a finger. Lift your feet too.

**Rumor** Don’t sit up straight. But new advice, often by our moms, to “Sit up straight.” But new research shows that a more “relaxed” position is better for people who spend a lot of time at a desk.

Using a new form of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), radiologists in Aberdeen, Scotland measured spinal angles and spinal disk height and movement across different positions. In other words, patients didn’t just lie flat, as they do in traditional scanning.

Presenting their findings to the North American Radiological Society, they showed that when weight-bearing strain is placed on the spine, it causes back disks to move out of place. Disk movement was most pronounced with a 90-degree upright sitting posture, and least pronounced with the 135-degree posture.

So the best position, based on the new research, is to:

Adjust your chair height until your hips are 3 to 4 inches higher than your knees. Then recline slightly so your back is at a 135-degree angle to your thighs. For added support, you might put a small pillow behind your lower back.

**Why is this important?**

Our bodies were not designed to be so sedentary. Data from the British Chiropractic Association says 32% of office workers spend more than 10 hours a day seated, and half do not leave their desks, even to have lunch. The great majority of people also sit down when they get home from work.

**New advice, ‘Don’t sit up straight’**

We were told as kids, often by our moms, to “Sit up straight.” But new research shows that a more “relaxed” position is better for people who spend a lot of time at a desk.

Using a new form of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), radiologists in Aberdeen, Scotland measured spinal angles and spinal disk height and movement across different positions. In other words, patients didn’t just lie flat, as they do in traditional scanning.

Presenting their findings to the North American Radiological Society, they showed that when weight-bearing strain is placed on the spine, it causes back disks to move out of place. Disk movement was most pronounced with a 90-degree upright sitting posture, and least pronounced with the 135-degree posture.

So the best position, based on the new research, is to:

Adjust your chair height until your hips are 3 to 4 inches higher than your knees. Then recline slightly so your back is at a 135-degree angle to your thighs. For added support, you might put a small pillow behind your lower back.

**Why is this important?**

Our bodies were not designed to be so sedentary. Data from the British Chiropractic Association says 32% of office workers spend more than 10 hours a day seated, and half do not leave their desks, even to have lunch. The great majority of people also sit down when they get home from work.

**Did you hear the one about coffee?**

Over the years, experts have warned that too much coffee could harm your health and shorten your life. But new research that took into account other health-related characteristics (like smoking, alcohol use, and physical activity) has shown that people who regularly drink coffee live a little longer.

The New England Journal of Medicine (May 2012) reported this and other findings of the National Institutes of Health–AARP Diet and Health Study that examined 402,260 adults, ages 50 to 71, starting in 1995. The participants were free of heart disease, cancer and stroke when the study began.

It’s important to remember that caffeine is a drug that may interfere with or enhance the effects of other drugs such as some estrogens and antibiotics.

How coffee is brewed can make a health difference too. The two potentially harmful chemicals in coffee (caffestol and kahweol) remain in espresso, French press and boiled coffee but are removed when coffee is prepared through a filter.

—Adapted from The New York Times

**Here’s some good news for coffee drinkers**

The study was preliminary, short-term and inconclusive. The best long-term studies show that people lose (and keep off) as much weight on high-carb diets as they do on low-carb diets. The message is: Don’t just lift a finger. Lift your feet too.

**Rumor** Cutting back on salt is useless or dangerous. This was based on a New York Times article headlined “Salt, We Misjudged You.” The author, freelance writer Gary Taubes, charged that many studies have failed to prove the connection between eating too much salt, hypertension and stroke. He suggested that reducing sodium may do more harm than good.

**Real Story** This article got immediate blow-back from doctors, researchers and health experts. One of the studies Taubes cited was of people on a extremely low-sodium diet, which is atypical for most Americans. And much of what he wrote was based on opinion rather than evidence. The bottom line is that most of us consume too much salt, especially from processed and fast-food sources. Many long-term studies have found that reducing salt lowers one’s risk of heart attacks and strokes.

—Adapted from Consumer Reports on Health

**Did you hear the one about coffee?**

Over the years, experts have warned that too much coffee could harm your health and shorten your life. But new research that took into account other health-related characteristics (like smoking, alcohol use, and physical activity) has shown that people who regularly drink coffee live a little longer.

The New England Journal of Medicine (May 2012) reported this and other findings of the National Institutes of Health–AARP Diet and Health Study that examined 402,260 adults, ages 50 to 71, starting in 1995. The participants were free of heart disease, cancer and stroke when the study began.

It’s important to remember that caffeine is a drug that may interfere with or enhance the effects of other drugs such as some estrogens and antibiotics.

How coffee is brewed can make a health difference too. The two potentially harmful chemicals in coffee (caffestol and kahweol) remain in espresso, French press and boiled coffee but are removed when coffee is prepared through a filter.

—Adapted from The New York Times

**Here’s some good news for coffee drinkers**

Over the years, experts have warned that too much coffee could harm your health and shorten your life. But new research that took into account other health-related characteristics (like smoking, alcohol use, and physical activity) has shown that people who regularly drink coffee live a little longer.

The New England Journal of Medicine (May 2012) reported this and other findings of the National Institutes of Health–AARP Diet and Health Study that examined 402,260 adults, ages 50 to 71, starting in 1995. The participants were free of heart disease, cancer and stroke when the study began.

It’s important to remember that caffeine is a drug that may interfere with or enhance the effects of other drugs such as some estrogens and antibiotics.

How coffee is brewed can make a health difference too. The two potentially harmful chemicals in coffee (caffestol and kahweol) remain in espresso, French press and boiled coffee but are removed when coffee is prepared through a filter.

—Adapted from The New York Times
The mother of all pregnancy books

Clearly, times have changed. Being pregnant in 2012 is a whole new ball game—from high-tech methods of conception, to open discussions about prenatal and post-partum depression, to proudly showing off that baby bump.

In her revised, updated and authoritative book, Ann Douglas reassures and empowers today’s women about the ever-changing worlds of preconception, conception, pregnancy and birth.

This new edition includes a down-to-earth explanation of mother and baby’s brain changes and development. It deals with the transition to motherhood—and how to strengthen relationships with partners and significant others before, during and after pregnancy.

An incredibly comprehensive but easy-to-follow guide, it covers every aspect of pregnancy, from thinking about it, to nutrition, exercising, breast-feeding and the “top worries” of mothers to be.

The author talks frankly about what a woman can control about giving birth, and how to advocate for one’s personal decisions. She describes what the new research shows and suggests questions to ask a doctor or midwife long before the baby’s birth. Douglas also covers what can’t be planned, predicted or controlled about the birth experience.

A mother of four herself, Douglas deals with lifestyle concerns about fitness, sex and work, with a focus on staying well and staying comfortable.

She gets into what we have learned and what we still don’t know about environmental toxins, fetal development and the implications for parents-to-be.

Having a baby need not cost a fortune, she says, and her guide offers practical tips on budgeting and how to avoid the overspending, over-consumption trap.

Douglas has been the go-to expert on pregnancy since the first edition of this book was published in 2000, and she’s the author of other best-sellers in the The Mother of All series.

The Mother of All Pregnancy Books, second edition (Wiley, paperback, $15.00) is available in bookstores, online and as an ebook. For more information, visit www.having-a-baby.com ♦

Work & Family Life provides information and practical solutions to a wide range of family, job, and health issues. Our purpose is to help our readers reduce their stress and find pleasure and satisfaction in their many roles at work, at home, and in their communities.