

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2012 NC Cooperative Extension Buncombe County

EFNEP Assists Buncombe County to Meet State Education Requirements

Research shows nutrition education learned at an early age teaches children how to make healthy food choices. The improved ability to make informed food choices will help to ensure our children maintain a healthy lifestyle throughout adolescence and adulthood. This is why the North Carolina Essential Standards require that children be taught basic nutrition and physical activity concepts in elementary school. Since many teachers in Buncombe County feel they do not have the expertise needed to competently teach these important concepts, they have asked the local North Carolina Cooperative Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) to help them meet the state requirement.

Using hands-on learning experiences, EFNEP taught children from 1st to 5th grades about the MyPlate recommendations to eat a variety of foods at both school and at home in order to receive all the nutrients needed for optimal growth and development. EFNEP also discussed the importance of getting 60 minutes of physical activity each day.

To reinforce these learning concepts, the EFNEP program assistant shared samples of fun yet nutritious snack foods. Some snacks introduced the children to new ingredients and others showed how to use familiar foods in creative ways to make healthy after school snacks. The program assistant (PA) also shared with the children healthy recipes that could be made with parents at home as mealtime side dishes or desserts. One little girl told the PA that she and her mom had made every recipe EFNEP had sent home and said, "They were all so good!"

To reinforce the important role that aerobic exercises, strengthening and flexibility activities play in staying healthy, the PA taught the children how to incorporate all three into indoor and outdoor games. The teachers remarked that something as simple as dancing in the classroom to a popular song had improved the students' attention span and allowed for an environment conducive to learning throughout the day.

A comparison of pre and post program surveys measured the children's behavior changes in key objective areas. Results indicated that by the end of the EFNEP series, 99% of the children had increased their ability to select low-cost, nutritious foods, and 87% had increased their knowledge of human nutrition. In addition, the teachers noticed their students had started making healthier choices in the cafeteria and were more inclined to explore new foods in the lunch line. By the end of the series, 35% of the children had made strides in improving the time they spent being physically active.



Another testament to EFNEP's success in encouraging positive nutrition and physical activity behavior change was the fact that 100% of the teachers who had worked with EFNEP requested the program return to their classrooms in following years. They believed the knowledge gleaned at this early age would continue to benefit the children throughout their lives by helping to ensure they live a happy, healthy lifestyle.

Mother Experiences the Value of Family Meals

Studies have shown that eating together as a family reaps a wide spectrum of benefits.¹ Family mealtime experiences sharpen communication skills and build family bonds.² Nutritionally, families who eat together consume more fruits and vegetables, a wider variety of vitamins and minerals, and more juice.³ They intake less soda, fried foods, and saturated and trans fats.⁴ In addition, children who eat with their family more frequently carry these behaviors with them and choose healthier foods when eating away from home.⁵ Academically, children who eat with their families are more motivated at school and get better grades.⁶ And socially, they are better adjusted. They are able to build lasting friendships with peers and are less likely to do drugs or be depressed.⁷

To encourage families in Buncombe County to eat together more often, Cooperative Extension's Expanded Foods and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) delivered the "Fix it Fast, Eat at Home" lesson to a class of young mothers. During a subsequent lesson, one young mother shared with the program assistant that after learning the advantages of eating together as a family, she had gone home and cleared the cluttered dining room table. For the first time in years, she and her children are now eating their meals on that table and actually talking to one another. The children have enjoyed sharing the events of their days with her as much as she has enjoyed preparing EFNEP recipes for them; recipes that have been so enticing that even her daughter has been willing to try new vegetables!

The young mother said making this change in their family's eating behavior took time and effort, but after the significant difference it was making for her family, she knew the effort was worth it. Both she and her children have begun to treasure the special times eating as a family offers them. Because of EFNEP, family relationships are growing stronger and her children are eating a greater variety of healthy foods. She was amazed that something so simple could reap such great rewards.

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2. Fulkerson, J.A., Neumark-Sztainer, D., & Story, M. (2006) Adolescent and parent views of family meals. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 106:526-532.
3. Neumark-Sztainer, D., Hannan, P.J., Story, M., Croll, J., & Perry, C. (2003) Family meal patterns: Associations with sociodemographic characteristics and improved dietary intake among adolescents. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 103:317-322.
4. Ibid.
5. Neumark-Sztainer, D., Wall, M., Story, M., & Fulkerson, J.A. (2004) Are family meal patterns associated with disordered eating behaviors among adolescents? *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 35:350-359.
6. Eisenberg, M.E., Olson, R.E., Neumark-Sztainer, D., Story, M., & Bearinger, L.H. (2004) Correlations between family meals and psychosocial well-being among adolescents. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*, 158:792-796.
7. Ibid.

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