

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2012 NC Cooperative Extension Chowan County

Youth Take Steps to Combat Obesity

Prolonged unhealthy eating and physical inactivity significantly contributes to chronic disease and obesity. Childhood obesity has become a major problem in recent years; in fact, more than 3 out of 10 children between the ages of 2-18 are overweight or obese in North Carolina.¹ This is highly concerning because children who are overweight or obese have a 70–80 percent chance of being overweight or obese their entire lives.² Childhood obesity increases the risk for developing diseases such as type 2 diabetes or hypertension and making them more likely to face social discrimination and have low self-esteem.³

NC Cooperative Extension has conducted programs aimed at reducing the number of youth impacted by this epidemic. The 4-H Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) partnered with the Chowan County Schools and taught students how to identify healthy foods and healthy portion sizes. It also promoted physical activity and encouraged drinking more water instead of unhealthy sodas.

Each lesson incorporated a food preparation activity that allowed students to prepare and taste their own healthy meals, which encouraged students to take what they learned in class and use it in their everyday lives. Student's enhanced knowledge of nutrition, combined with their new skills in selecting and preparing healthy foods, will improve their eating habits and reduce their risk of obesity and obesity related diseases.

EFNEP Helps Students Prevent Foodborne Illnesses

Foodborne illnesses are almost 100 percent preventable, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 76 million foodborne illnesses occur in the US each year, including 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths.⁴ Proper food safety practices in preparing and storing food can significantly reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses.

The NC Cooperative Extension office in Chowan County and the 4-H Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, in partnership with Hertford Grammar School, has taken the initiative



to teach proper food safety skills to students. The program emphasizes the importance of food safety and teaches students how to handle food properly and prevent foodborne illnesses.

Third through fifth graders at Hertford Grammar School who completed the program improved their food safety knowledge. These kinds of impacts are improving year after year and will help reduce food borne illnesses in this county, which will in turn help reduce health care costs and improve these students' health.

EFNEP Interventions Increase Healthy Behaviors in Youth

Obesity continues to be a serious health concern in Chowan County. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the percentage of high school students in North Carolina who are overweight or obese has increased to 28.8% of the population.⁵ These findings are especially alarming for children and youth because being overweight or obese increases the risk of chronic diseases. Without proper interventions in our community to reverse this unhealthy and dangerous trend in young people, the youth in Chowan County risk not living long, healthy and productive lives.

NC Cooperative Extension and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program (EFNEP) has a program that targets youth ages 5-19 years old for this very reason. Students participate in six series of lessons on healthy eating habits, food preparation, food safety, and healthy exercise habits.

Upon completing the six week program, youth are evaluated to measure how behavior and attitudes on healthy food choices has changed. In fact, 75% of the youth participants increased their nutrition knowledge. As participants in EFNEP continue to increase their health knowledge and skills, they are able to make healthier, more nutritious choices in foods and behaviors. These skills are important lessons they can share with family members and use throughout their lives, which can greatly impact their long term health and quality of life.

1. Mead PS, Slutsker L, Dietz V, McCaig LF, Bresee JS, Shapiro C, Griffin PM, Tauxe RV. Food-related illness and death in the United States. *Emerg Infect Dis.* 1999, 5:607-625.

2. http://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@fc/documents/downloadable/ucm_304175.pdf

3. Ibid.

4. Mead PS, Slutsker L, Dietz V, McCaig LF, Bresee JS, Shapiro C, Griffin PM, Tauxe RV. Food-related illness and death in the United States. *Emerg Infect Dis.* 1999, 5:607-625.

5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 2011. *Surveillance Summaries*, 61(4):1-45.

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6104.pdf>

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