

2012 NC Cooperative Extension Guilford County

Men Learn How to Prevent Hypertension

Excessive weight is a major problem across the country, and is often the result of improper diet and not being physically active. Not only is physical inactivity dangerous to people's health, it is also very expensive in health care costs. A recent study found if the adult obesity rate in North Carolina remained at the 2008 rate of 29.5% rather than increasing, North Carolina would save an estimated \$851 per adult in health care costs by 2018, which would be a savings of \$6 billion dollars.¹ Physical inactivity is a serious and expensive public health problem; we know from research that increased physical activity can have long term positive effects on people's health and wellbeing.

In 2011, the Guilford County's Health Report showed 61.5% of the adult population was overweight or obese. Because of this startling statistic, the NC Cooperative Extension partnered with UNCG Hypertension Research project to deliver the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) to a group of eleven African American males aged 25 to 45 at high risk for hypertension. During the program, the men learned how to plan weekly healthy meals, shop with a grocery list, practice better food safety techniques, and the importance of physical activity.

At the end of the classes, the percentage of males participating in over 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous activity most days of the week increased from 44% to 78%. This increase in physical activity can greatly improve these men's health and has the potential to result in fewer costly visits to the doctor for chronic diseases.

Youth Start Eating Less Fast Food

Recent research has shown that children's food preferences and eating patterns are largely a reflection of their parents' eating habits.² As children get older, they have more freedom to make their own choices and develop their own eating habits; these are often influenced by the media and their peers. In an effort to help adolescents improve their food choices, 4-H EFNEP offers nutrition lessons geared to their level and interests. These lessons have proven to be helpful not only for them, but also for their parents, as evidence by one student from Eastern Guilford High School in Greensboro.

After learning about the benefits of having a varied food intake, how to read nutrition labels and the perils of fast food, one student reported that she has reduced her trips to fast food restaurants and is eating more meals at home. She also indicated she makes sure her mother takes a closer look at the nutrition labels when going to the grocery store in order to make better food choices for their family. This young lady's group showed a 60% improvement in vegetable and fruit consumption. Like her, many other students reported eating more balanced meals and are more aware of what they eat.

Youth Is Encouraged to Join a Sports Team

Children in the United States are less physically than they were a generation ago. According to one of the recent reports from the Surgeon General on Physical Activity and Health, nearly half of the young people 12-21 years old are not vigorously active.³ Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for developing many chronic diseases. Research shows that children who physically inactive are more likely to become physically inactive adults, but implementing good exercise habits at a young age can reduce children's immediate obesity-related health risks and can continue into adulthood.⁴

4-H EFNEP addresses these concerns by promoting physical activity and healthy eating habits among young people. We hope the results can positively impact our participants as it happened to a student at The Academy at Smith in Guilford County. This particular student reported to be worried about participating in school sports and not having the energy to perform well. After taking the EFNEP nutrition lessons, he approached the Program Assistant and shared that he began practicing for the basketball team and was much more physically active. He indicated that the lessons gave him the tools for having a more active lifestyle and managing his eating habits in order to have the energy needed.

Pregnant Mothers' Eyes Opened on Portion Sizes

Portion control is a critical part of successful weight loss and maintaining a healthy weight. Eating smaller portions of food is one of the easiest ways to cut back on calories, but it can also be one of the most challenging. Over the past few decades, portion sizes have gotten bigger. Unfortunately, Americans have gotten bigger too. In the 1970's around 47 percent of Americans were overweight or obese, but now 66 percent of Americans are. Increased portion sizes provide too many calories and encourage people to eat more food than they need. Because portions are so large now, it's hard to understand what a serving size is supposed to be.

EFNEP, in partnership with the NC Guilford County Cooperative Extension, conducted a workshop for pregnant and parenting teens. Through the program's lessons, these mothers realized that they underestimated the amount of food they actually eat and overestimated the recommended portion sizes for many foods. The lesson taught the difference between portion size and serving size, how eating the right amount of food supports a healthy weight, and guides to estimating a smart-size portion. The participants were able to look at food models to see what a normal portion of different foods is. They learned what their plate should look like and how much food should go on it. They also learned what 2,000 calories a day look like. The participants said they now know what overeating looks like, and that they are going to keep a closer watch on what they eat. Through the EFNEP lessons, these young mothers learned how to be healthy for themselves, and also are healthy role models to their children.

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3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Physical activity and health: A report of the surgeon general executive summary.

4. Dietz WH. 1996. The role of lifestyle in health: The epidemiology and consequences of inactivity. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 55, 829-840; Dennison BA, Straus JH, Mellits D, Charney E. 1988. Childhood physical fitness tests: Predictor of adult physical activity levels? *Pediatrics*, 82, 324-330; Tammelin T, Nayha S, Laitinen J, Rintamaki H, Jarelin MR. 2003. Physical activity and social status in adolescence as predictors of physical inactivity in adulthood. *Preventive Medicine*, 37, 375-381.

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