

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2012 NC Cooperative Extension Mecklenburg County

Participants Learn about Food Safety

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.¹ Proper food safety practices in preparing and storing food can significantly reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses. Because of the dangers associated with foodborne illnesses, the NC Cooperative Extension, in partnership with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), has taken the initiative to teach proper food safety skills to families in Mecklenburg County.

After participants learned about the harmful effects of food borne illness and the rapid growth of dangerous bacteria that can occur from thawing foods out at room temperature, one participant vowed to, "never to leave his frozen turkey out again, and I thaw all of my frozen meats in the refrigerator now!" EFNEP not only is teaching about the importance of food safety, but will help reduce food borne illnesses in Mecklenburg County, which will in turn help reduce health care costs.

Participants Have Fun Learning Healthy Cooking

In Mecklenburg County, the number of overweight and obese individuals has steadily grown in recent years. In fact, compared to other states, North Carolina ranks 41st in obesity prevalence, and fewer adults are physically active (44.0% versus 49.5%).² This trend is appearing in children as well; more than 3 out of 10 children between the ages of 2-18 in North Carolina are overweight or obese, placing them at increased 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

Prolonged unhealthy eating and physical inactivity significantly contributes to chronic disease and obesity. Childhood obesity has become a major problem in recent years, and NC Cooperative Extension has conducted programs aimed at reducing the number of youth impacted by this epidemic.

One of the ways the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) is helping to combat these alarming figures is working with parents and their preschool children to encourage



healthy eating habits.

Through a series of classes, parents are taught basic nutrition concepts and sample healthy recipes to reduce calorie consumption, lower fat intake and decrease sodium in their family's diet. In turn, their children are introduced to colorful fruits, vegetables, proteins, grains and dairy, through a fun and engaging storytelling. One participant stated, "To be honest, I never had a desire to cook, until I attended EFNEP. Because of the nutritious and no sodium added recipes prepared at each session, I am able to recreate healthy recipes for my family to enjoy. Now I find joy and personal satisfaction in preparing meals for them that could reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke!" In this manner, both parents and children are taught to Eat Smart and Move More, thereby bridging the gap to healthy eating.

Youth Are Shocked by the Amount of Sugar in Sodas

Research show that the increased consumption of soda and other sugar-sweetened beverages is directly linked to rising obesity and diabetes rates among children and youth. Americans consume about 65 more calories a day from soft drinks than they did 30 years ago, which can add up to about 7 pounds of weight gain every year, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It is critical that children and teens develop proper nutrition habits early in life because overweight or obese children are at a greater risk of becoming obese adults.⁴

In order to combat the negative impact soda has on children's health, the 4-H EFNEP Program in Mecklenburg County taught a session called Making Smart Drink Choices to a group of at risk teenage youth girls (Teen Health Connections Mecklenburg County). During the session, the youth were able to visualize the amount of sugar soft drinks contain and the amount of calories without providing any nutrients that the body needs for functioning, such as vitamin A, C, and calcium. Because of what she learned at EFNEP, one teenager decided that she would include water with every meal, and that she would carry her 4-H water bottle to school with her to inform her friends about the importance of drinking water.

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. United Health Foundation. America's health rankings: North Carolina. America's Health Rankings website. <http://www.americashealthrankings.org/yearcompare/2008/2009/NC.aspx>

3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Overweight and obesity. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website.

<http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/consequences.html>

4. Boston Public Health Commission. Think about your drink. Newsroom, 2008.

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