

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2012 NC Cooperative Extension Northampton County

Families Experience the Benefits of Family Meals

Given the pressures of day-to-day life and the fast pace of today's working families, many people believe they simply do not have time to eat healthy. Yet prolonged unhealthy eating and physical inactivity significantly contributes to chronic disease and obesity. This is a major problem in North Carolina; in fact, NC ranks poorly in overall health when compared to other states. According to America's Health Rankings, North Carolina stood 37th among the 50 states in 2009 for overall health.¹ The state ranks in the bottom third for many health indicators, including 41st in obesity prevalence, 40th in premature death, and 35th in cancer death rates.² When compared to the nation, fewer adults are physically active (44.0% versus 49.5%) and more are obese (29.5% versus 26.7%).³ These statistics are also being found in children; 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.⁴

In order to address these alarming rates, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) in Northampton County at the NC Cooperative Extension is educating families about healthy eating and exercise. One way this is accomplished is through family meal planning. Participants have found that incorporating family meals into their schedules are a comforting ritual for both parents and

kids. One parent says they get a chance to catch up with their kids on every day activities. She also says when her kids take part in cooking, they are more likely to eat more fruits and vegetables, and grains, and are also less likely to snack on unhealthy foods. In addition, family meals offer the chance to introduce kids to new foods and to act as a role model for healthy eating. Mealtimes are also an important way for families to reconnect.

After completing the class, one parent said that the information she learned was very helpful to her and her family. She says she no longer eat out as often as she used to, and instead she cooks simple and health meals at home. She recently was diagnosed with diabetes, and from the lessons she learned in class, she has lost 70 pounds. She says that EFNEP enhanced her awareness of what to look for when she shops and prepare foods for herself and her family. She pays more attention to food labels and says that this class has helped her change the way she eats and lives.

EFNEP supports families who struggle overcoming the barriers to living a healthy lifestyle through education, budgeting, community support, and creative ways to prepare and cook healthy foods. With EFNEP, many families impacted by the program have made the necessary changes in their lifestyles to decrease their risk of chronic disease and improve their family's overall health and wellbeing.



EFNEP helps address the challenges limited resource families face when introducing healthy changes through nutrition education, cooking classes, exercise strategies, and shopping on a limited budget.

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

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Overweight and obesity. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/consequences.html>.

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