

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2012 NC Cooperative Extension Vance County

Children Learn the Importance of Healthy Eating and Exercise

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 In Vance County, the percentage of overweight children is higher than the state percentage:

Prevalence of Childhood Obesity, Ages 5-11 Years ²			
	2000	2004	2008
Vance County	22.0%	28.8%	32.5%
North Carolina	20.6%	23.8%	25.7%

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.³ 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.⁴

In Vance County, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) has found that some parents do not always know what makes up a healthy diet. For this reason, parents sometimes allow their children to make unhealthy choices such as drinking a lot of sugar sweetened beverages or getting too many calories from unhealthy foods. Many children who do not supplement exercise with their nutritional intake risk becoming overweight or obese.

In order to combat the growing problem of childhood obesity, 4-H EFNEP works with the Vance County youth to help them understand the importance of good nutrition habits like eating fruits and vegetables every day and limiting sugar intake. They also learn how to balance eating healthy and being physically active. 4-H EFNEP help the children understand My Plate and how it offers personalized eating plans, interactive tools to help plan and assess food choices. After completing the EFNEP lessons, one group of ten children agreed to set goals to eat healthier snacks and be physical



active 60 minutes every day. One child expressed that she was going home and ask her mother to buy more fruits and vegetables so she can have the food she needs to prepare healthy snacks every day.

Participant Saves Money and Improves Sanitation in Her Home

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.⁵ 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 EFNEP, has taken the initiative to teach proper food safety skills to families in Vance County.

During the EFNEP classes, participants learn how to keep food safe from harmful bacteria within their homes. One parent said that now she's mindful of how bacteria can make you ill, so she is extra careful about how she thaws food. Another participant expressed that she has saved about \$20 dollars a month by not buying expensive cleaning products. She now uses the plastic spray bottle she received as a skill builder in her EFNEP class and makes the chlorine solution each day to sanitize her home. She also said her 5 year old son is no longer getting sick all the time which she attributes to following proper sanitizing procedures for her food preparation surfaces.

By teaching participants simple and inexpensive ways to prevent foodborne illnesses, EFNEP works to improve the overall health of the community and as a result can help reduce health care costs.

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. 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. North Carolina Statewide and County Trends in Key Health Indicators: Vance County. http://www.gvhdh.org/download/CHA%20Appendix%20F_2008%20VC%20key%20indicator%20trends_2012.pdf

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

4. Ibid.

5. 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.

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