

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2012 NC Cooperative Extension Warren County

Participant Takes Time Each Week to Plan Her Meals and Saves Money

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 and money to eat healthy. In the last several years, Americans have seen a steady increase in the cost of food and food products, while also experiencing a decrease in wages. No socioeconomic group has suffered more than limited income families. This is a major concern because poverty is strongly associated with a wide range of health problems, including chronic disease. Research shows that the highest rates of obesity occur among population groups with the highest poverty rates.¹ This is partly influenced by the fact that the lowest cost food options are usually composed of unhealthy calories, including refined grains, added sugars and fats. Poverty is associated with low fruit and vegetable consumption and lower-quality diets.

In Warren County, 24.4% of households are living in poverty, which is higher than the state percentage of 14.6%.² For this reason, the Warren Family Institution and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) partnered to help inform low income participants how to purchase and prepare healthy meals while maintaining a limited food budget. EFNEP classes discuss topics such as setting goals, creating and managing food dollars. In these classes, parents learn to plan and manage their time while learning how to save money at the grocery store. One young mother of 3 stated that the information she learned in class helped her save time and money when planning meals for herself and her children. She shared, "Every Sunday, I take 30 minutes to cut coupons, look at store ads, and make a shopping list for the week to come." She also stated that the class has made a huge difference in her life because it has given her the tools needed to save money and time while efficiently feeding her family. In addition, she concluded our conversation by saying, "I can't wait until my kids get older so they can help me in the kitchen!"

Students Improve Hand Washing Habits

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.³ 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 teens in Warren 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 student said that he saw his mother cutting up chicken and then putting her vegetable on the same cutting board without washing it off first. He told his mother that he learned in class that you always clean the cutting board after cutting meats to protect against food borne illnesses. One teacher expressed that her students are now using hand sanitizer and washing their hands more often. She also noticed only one of her student has been out of school this year due to colds.

By taking simple steps to reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses, these students are more aware of healthy behaviors and are protecting themselves and their families against disease.



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. Drewnowski A, Specter SE. (2004) Poverty and obesity: The role of energy density and energy costs. American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 79(1): 6-16.

2. Warren County North Carolina 2010 Community Health Assessment, http://www.warrencountync.com/_fileUploads/forms/482_CHA%202010%20document%20final.pdf

3. 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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