

# EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

## 2012 NC Cooperative Extension North Carolina Report

### Mother Becomes Motivated to Get Healthy After EFNEP

Changing behavior can be very challenging for anyone because diet and lifestyle is greatly influenced by a person's culture, physical environment, and social networks; these challenges are often compounded for limited resource families because of constrained budgets. Although sometimes difficult, small changes in diet and lifestyle can make a big impact on a person's health and wellbeing.

In Durham, approximately 65% of adults are overweight or obese this year.<sup>1</sup> Being overweight or obese is a significant risk factor for many chronic diseases, including diabetes, heart disease and some cancers. It is also very expensive: if the adult obesity rate 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 is a savings of \$6 billion dollars.<sup>2</sup> Obesity is extremely damaging for North Carolina's health, quality of life, and finances.

To improve these concerning statistics, a participant in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) in Durham County changed a few habits to make a significant difference in her lifestyle. Since the start of the sessions in October 2011, she began eating more fruits and vegetables, drinking more water and reading food labels. Instead of drinking sodas and other soft drinks, she chooses water and 100% fruit juice for herself and her two children.

From what she learned at EFNEP, this participant now reads Nutrition Facts labels, and plays close attention to the sugar, carbohydrate, sodium and fat content of foods. She plans her meals on a regular basis and cooks more meals at home. She even prepared the mini meatloaves and easy lasagna recipes; her family loved them! Her children are now more involved with cooking and sees the rich value of family mealtime. As an added bonus, this participant was inspired by the "Walk at Home" DVD and walks five days per week for an hour. She recently discovered that she lost 5 pounds.

She proudly states, "If someone shows me the correct way to do something, I will try it. Before taking the classes, I had no motivation. Now I am excited and very motivated to do even more for my health." EFNEP is a great way to encourage people to change their habits for the better.

### EFNEP Assists Buncombe County to Meet State Education Requirements

Research shows nutrition education learned at an early age teaches children how to make healthy food choices. The improved ability to make informed food choices will help to ensure our children maintain a healthy lifestyle throughout adolescence and adulthood. This is why

the North Carolina Essential Standards require that children be taught basic nutrition and physical activity concepts in elementary school. Since many teachers in Buncombe County feel they do not have the expertise needed to competently teach these important concepts, they have asked the local North Carolina Cooperative Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) to help them meet the state requirement.

Using hands-on learning experiences, EFNEP taught children from 1st to 5th grades about the MyPlate recommendations to eat a variety of foods at both school and at home in order to receive all the nutrients needed for optimal growth and development. EFNEP also discussed the importance of getting 60 minutes of physical activity each day.

The EFNEP program assistant shared samples of fun yet nutritious snack foods with students. Some snacks introduced the children to new ingredients and others showed how to use familiar foods in creative ways to make healthy after school snacks. The program assistant (PA) also shared with the children healthy recipes that could be made with parents at home as mealtime side dishes or desserts. One little girl told the PA that she and her mom had made every recipe EFNEP had sent home and said, "They were all so good!"

To reinforce the important role that aerobic exercises, strengthening and flexibility activities play in staying healthy, the PA taught the children how to incorporate all three into indoor and outdoor games. The teachers remarked that something as simple as dancing in the classroom to a popular song had improved the students' attention span and allowed for an environment conducive to learning throughout the day.

A comparison of pre and post program surveys measured the children's behavior changes in key objective areas. Results indicated that by the end of the EFNEP series, 99% of the children had increased their ability to select low-cost, nutritious foods, and 87% had increased their knowledge of human nutrition. In addition, the teachers noticed their students had started making healthier choices in the cafeteria and were more inclined to explore new foods in the lunch line. By the end of the series, 35% of the children had made strides in improving the time they spent being physically active.

Another testament to EFNEP's success in encouraging positive nutrition and physical activity behavior change was the fact that 100% of the teachers who had worked with EFNEP requested the program return to their classrooms in following years. They believed the knowledge gleaned at this early age would continue to benefit the children throughout their lives by helping to ensure they live a happy, healthy lifestyle.



1. State Center for Health Statistics, NC Department of Health and Human Services. North Carolina Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey System (BRFSS), 2005-2009. <http://www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/brfss>  
2. Thorpe K. (2009) The Future Costs of Obesity: National and state estimates of the impacts of obesity on direct health care expenses. Collaborative report from United Health Foundation, the American Public Health Association and Partnership for Prevention.

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