

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2013 NC Cooperative Extension Congressional District 12

Serving Cabarrus, Forsyth, Guilford and Mecklenburg counties



Community Comes Together to Improve Health and Family Bonds

Research suggests that families who eat together are less likely to dine out (fried food and soda) and are more likely to serve fruits or vegetables and other healthy foods during dinnertime.¹ Family meals provide parents a learning opportunity where they can teach social skills, table manners, and basic cooking skills.²

Cooperative Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) in Mecklenburg County offered a series of EFNEP classes to the residents of a low-income apartment complex. During the lessons, participants learned strategies to make healthy choices, including preparing more meals at home. At each lesson, participants met in the kitchen of the property's rental office and prepared a healthy recipe as part of the lesson.

Following the lesson each week, a few of the participants would combine their money to purchase the ingredients for the recipe, and one participant would host the other participants and their families for dinner that week. The weekly dinner featured the EFNEP recipe alongside other family favorites. In case one participant missed the lesson that week, the others would teach the participant how to make the recipe. One participant shared that before the EFNEP lessons, she didn't like to cook, and her family ate mostly convenience foods and fast food. She said because of the lessons, they now select healthier choices—foods lower in sugar and sodium. Her son enjoys the Easy Fruit Salad recipe, and she prepares it for him to eat as an after school snack. After a recent class, the participant shared, "I love that I decided to learn, enjoy, and see firsthand how to eat smart and move more!"

This community's story is a great example of how simple changes can make a dramatic impact on the health and wellbeing of all members of the families served by the program. With the knowledge and support EFNEP provides, families and communities are encouraged to live healthier lives.

Young Mother Learns To Cook Meals at Home and Save Money

Americans spend approximately 42% of their food budget on food away from home.³ Research suggests meals away from home tend to be less nutritious than food prepared at home.⁴ Often people choose meals away from home because they lack the necessary skills to prepare recipes. Cooperative Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) teaches participants the skills they need to plan, shop, cook and eat more meals at home.

During a recent series of EFNEP lessons, the program assistant taught a group of new, young mothers how to make healthy choices for their families. The program assistant taught the group how to plan a menu for a week of meals, create a shopping list, and prepare the recipes. Many participants shared they had not done so before, and often relied on convenience foods and fast food for meals. One participant, who was pregnant and had a toddler, stated she ate fast food because she felt that was what she could afford, and she thought it was a healthy option because it had lettuce and tomato. During the series, she shared that she started planning her meals and making a shopping list. She stated that she learned how to shop and now uses unit pricing to find the best deal on items. The participant now sees that it can be less expensive to feed her family by cooking healthy meals at home. Also she feels more confident to cook for her family.

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. Marino, M., & Butkus, Sue (n.d.). Background: Research on family meals. <http://nutrition.wsu.edu/ebet/background.html>.

2. Family Nutrition: The Truth about Family Meals. Family Youth and Community Sciences Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date September 2008. Revised January 2012. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

3. Todd, Jessica E., Lisa Mancino, and Biing-Hwan Lin. The Impact of Food Away From Home on Adult Diet Quality, ERR-90, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, February 2010.

4. Ibid

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