

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2013 NC Cooperative Extension Clay County

Meatless Meals Helps Young Mother Control Food Costs

North Carolina's unemployment rate through 2013 continued to be above the national average. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics tracked the unemployment in Clay County to be 8% in their July 2013 report. During this same time frame, USDA's Economic Research Service consumer price index shows a significant increase (4-5%) in the cost of fresh fruits and vegetables and poultry in 2013, making homemakers with limited resources question whether or not they can afford to feed their family healthy meals on a limited budget.¹

This was the case for one young Clay County mother who attended an Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) series offered in collaboration with the local Women Infants and Children (WIC) clinic. The young mother shared with the EFNEP program assistant that she was having difficulty stretching her food dollars. She knew protein was an important nutrient, but meat was just too expensive. She needed help finding less expensive protein sources to feed her family as well as planning and budgeting to be able to include fruits and vegetables in family meals.

The program assistant explained that the USDA's *MyPlate* recommendation for protein could be met through foods other than meat. For example, eggs and legumes could contribute to the 5½-ounce daily recommendation at a lesser cost. The participant learned that legumes like dried beans and peas contained generous amounts of the nutrient. If eaten in a meal without a meat source, these foods could be considered the meal's major protein source.

EFNEP taught the participant how to plan meatless meals that could stretch her food dollars and then challenged her to create weekly menus where lower cost protein sources like eggs and beans could become the main dish. She planned meals in which quiche, omelets, or beans with rice were served with a variety of in-season fruits and vegetables. The young mother learned how to shop for the best values on fruits and vegetables to accompany her family meals, comparing in-season fresh to store specials on canned and frozen varieties to determine the best buy. Being able to include fruits and vegetables in addition to low-cost proteins was important to this young mother because she learned these foods provide many important nutrients for her family. EFNEP helped this participant successfully stretch her food budget without sacrificing her family's health.

Reducing Sodium Intake Results in Healthy Baby

The Centers for Disease Control has reported that Americans consume too much sodium, which has been associated with negative health effects including increased blood pressure.² High blood pressure in pregnant women is especially dangerous.³ The Mayo Clinic and The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute agree that high blood pressure in pregnancy can cause low birth weight, premature delivery, kidney issues, and other birthing complications.⁴ The March of Dimes Campaign research shows that babies delivered preterm can have an average added cost of \$51,000.⁵ Through on-site nutrition education classes offered by the Clay County Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), pregnant women visiting the Women Infants and Children's (WIC) Clinic in Clay County learn ways they can monitor their salt intake throughout their pregnancy. Recently, WIC was especially concerned about the sodium intake of one young pregnant client. In an effort to make her more cognizant of her salt intake, WIC referred her to EFNEP.

The EFNEP program assistant explained the health risks associated with high salt intake. She taught the pregnant client how to read the Nutrition Facts Label and during the classes, the pregnant participant learned how to make dishes at home using spices other than salt for flavor. She was encouraged to practice what she learned as part of EFNEP at home. Now, understanding the risks, the young client cautiously reads the Nutrition Facts Label on foods when shopping. She has been amazed at the amount of sodium contained in the processed foods found in her pantry. She can't afford to discard them, so she has vowed to eat them in small portions until they were gone.

Since her participation in EFNEP, this client has delivered a healthy baby. She shared that learning to prepare recipes at home has not only helped her lower her salt intake, but has also helped her save money on her weekly grocery bill. She has successfully eliminated high-sodium, processed foods from her shopping list and is preparing low-salt EFNEP recipes at home to ensure her sodium levels remain low.

Having a healthy baby was important to this young participant and she credits EFNEP for helping her have a complication-free delivery of a strong and active baby.



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. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook.aspx#26630>
2. <http://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/sodium.htm>
3. http://kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_center/dietary_needs/eating_pregnancy.html

4. http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/hbp_preg.htm
5. <http://www.marchofdimes.com/research.asp>

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