

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2013 NC Cooperative Extension Transylvania County County



Healthy Eating Can Reduce Tooth Decay

The most common chronic infectious disease among children is dental caries (tooth decay). In Transylvania County, the rate of untreated decay among young children has surpassed the state average.¹ Tooth decay, if untreated, can impede a child's social, emotional, and cognitive development. It can also affect a child's ability to receive proper nutrition. Poor nutrition caused by inadequate dental hygiene can result in an increased incidence of tooth decay further compounding the issue.

Recognizing the synergistic effect of a healthy diet coupled with proper dental hygiene to overall health, the Cooperative Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) established a partnership with the local health department in Transylvania county to address the issue. The EFNEP Program Assistant incorporated dental education into the First Grade, Show Me Nutrition lesson about dairy foods. Nutrition concepts introduced during the lesson included the benefits of consuming foods from the dairy group, calcium's role in building strong teeth, and the importance of choosing healthy snacks and beverages, like low fat milk instead of sugary snacks and sodas. Healthy dental hygiene and proper tooth care was demonstrated for the children by the Transylvania County Health Department's Dental Health Educator. In an effort to support the educational goals of this partnership, the United Way supplemented related costs. With its help, 144 children were provided with dental hygiene kits that included a toothbrush, floss and toothpaste.

This collaborative effort between Cooperative Extension's EFNEP and the Health Department resulted in these young children learning both healthy eating choices to promote good dental health and good dental hygiene to prevent dental carries.

Youth Cuts Daily Sugar-Sweetened Drinks, Reduces Calories

About 16% of the average American's calories come from added sugars. Most of these added sugars are consumed in the form of sugar-sweetened beverages like soda, energy drinks, sports drinks, fruit drinks and sweet tea.² These beverages provide a lot of calories but almost no essential nutrients or dietary fiber. The EFNEP Program Assistant wanted Transylvania County fifth graders to be more cognizant of the amount of added sugar they were consuming from sugar-sweetened beverages. The Program Assistant demonstrated the amount of sugar found in a typical soda then challenged the students to calculate their individual annual sugar intakes based on the number of sodas consumed each week. Most of the students were shocked by their findings. One student quietly approached the Program Assistant after class and admitted he was embarrassed about the amount of sugar he consumed. The Program Assistant reassured the child the activity was just for personal awareness only, he did not have to share his results. As the two reflected on the activity, the child responded, "I had no idea I was drinking so much sugar. I'm going to cut back on soda." Their conversation continued with a brief discussion about ways to reduce the number of sodas consumed. The child decided he would include more water and nutrient dense beverages like low fat or fat free milk in his diet. A week later, the student proudly reported that he had successfully cut one soda per day from his diet. In doing so, he had reduced his intake of sugar-sweetened drink calories by approximately 150 per day or 5475 per year.

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. Transylvania County Department of Public Health. Community Health Assessment (CHA). Retrieved June 10, 2013

2. U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010. 7th Edition, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, December 2010 pg.27-28

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