

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

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Serving Avery, Buncombe, Clay, Jackson, Macon, Mitchell, Swain, Transylvania
and Yancey counties



EFNEP Helps Young Boy Overcome Iron Deficiency

In Jackson County, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) partners with the local schools to deliver a series of nutrition education lessons focused on developing healthy lifestyles. During a recent fourth grade series, one of the students told the EFNEP program assistant that he had passed out over the weekend. Test results showed his iron levels were dangerously low. He was concerned, "I want to choose nutritious snacks, but most of the time there are no healthy options at home. What should I do?"

Upon questioning the boy, the program assistant learned that because his mother worked at night, he and his older brother were often left to plan and prepare their own evening meals. If there was not enough food for a meal, they often snacked on whatever they could find in the cupboards.

The program assistant took the time to review with the young boy major nutrients found in each MyPlate food group, pointing out the foods in each group in which iron could most easily be found. They discussed foods found in the protein group like meat, fish and chicken, and various vegetables like beans and greens in which iron could be found. They also discussed how to read the food label so when shopping with his mother he could easily find food products like cereals and breads that were enriched or fortified with iron. Lastly, because cooking meals could be a safety concern for young children, the program assistant provided recipes the boy and his brother could create themselves with little or no cooking. She also provided recipes their mother could prepare ahead of time and be warmed by the boys when she was not at home.

Most appreciative, the boy took home the information about foods high in iron and reviewed it with his mother and brother. Together, they chose recipes the boys could prepare in which those foods were main ingredients and discussed how those dishes could be used to create simple evening meals when their mother wasn't home.

By teaching this young boy about the nutrients provided in each of MyPlate's dietary food groups and sharing easy yet nutritious recipes young children could prepare at home, EFNEP had positively impacted the boy's iron level and provided the family with nutritional knowledge that would improve their dietary intake for years to come.

EFNEP Lessons Bring Family Together

"Let's Cook Together," a USDA nutrition newsletter provided for parents of young children, states cooking with children teaches self-confidence, self-esteem and early skills of independence.¹ It also provides a venue where special parent-child experiences can strengthen family bonds and allow a child to confirm his value as a family member. Children feel proud and important when they help prepare food for the family.

This philosophy recently proved to be true for one Mitchell County family. Their first grade foster daughter became interested in cooking while participating in the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program. Taught in the local schools, EFNEP delivers a series of six lessons that teach children how to eat healthy and become more physically active. During each series, the children participate in hands-on cooking or food tasting experiences. For this family's foster daughter, EFNEP was the catalyst that instilled the self-confidence and pride needed to prove, in her eyes, a valued place in the family.

Making a special trip to the school after the EFNEP series had ended, the foster mother spoke to her daughter's teacher about the program.

Information shared in EFNEP had provided topics of conversation her family could use to bond with the little girl. She said prior to EFNEP the girl hardly spoke and found it difficult to connect with the family. But, while participating in EFNEP she came home every evening excitedly talking about food, nutrition and the recipes she had tasted in class. Since EFNEP, the child had taken an active interest in preparing family meals and become the family's "best kitchen helper."

The mother thanked the teacher for allowing EFNEP in her classroom and encouraged the school to continue participating in the program. She said, "You never know how extracurricular experiences like this can enrich a child's life." She continued by stating that EFNEP had not only brought her family together, it had made them all more health conscious. They were making better food choices, and now looked forward to mealtimes when they could converse and create fun family memories. She reiterated that EFNEP changed their lives. It had done more than teach how to live a healthy lifestyle. It provided a scared little girl with the confidence and self-esteem needed to take her reserved place as a valued member of their family. To conclude, she paraphrased an old adage, "EFNEP is the universal language that brought our family together!"

1. http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Nibbles_Newsletter_31.pdf

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