

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2014 NC Cooperative Extension Avery and Mitchell Counties

Planning, Shopping, and Preparing Meals Becomes a Family Event

A study in the August 2011 issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, found that with the busy schedules Americans keep, many families more often eat drive-thru fast foods, restaurant carryout meals, or packaged convenience foods prepared at home.¹ These foods are higher in calories, fat, and sodium than meals prepared from scratch at home.² Homemade meals, on the other hand, include more fruits, vegetables, and dairy foods. They also contain more nutrients such as fiber, calcium, vitamins A and C, and folate.³ Another benefit of eating foods prepared at home is that children become more interested in learning how to cook the foods they eat and are more willing to try any new foods they might cook.

To share the advantages of eating at home, Avery County's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) delivered a series of lessons to the parents of children enrolled in 4-H afterschool. Throughout the program, both the parents and the children were given a chance to taste quick, easy, and nutritious recipes that could be made at home. Parents were taught how to organize their time so the family could eat fewer meals on the run and more meals at home. They also learned how to make dinnertime a family event.

Upon graduating from the program, one mother reported that she and her children were now preparing for the family every recipe found in the EFNEP Cookbook. They were selecting recipes, shopping for ingredients, and working together to prepare meals around those recipes. She'd noticed the kids were more willing to try foods not tried before, more interested in cooking new dishes, and more eager to spend mealtime together as a family. When the mother requested additional recipes to make with the kids, the EFNEP program assistant referred her to NC EFNEP's Facebook and blog sites where she could find healthy tips and recipes on an ongoing basis.

By organizing her weekly meal planning and preparation process, this mother was able to provide more nutritious foods at home for her family. Her family, in turn, had found eating nutritiously was not only good for them, but provided a good source of family fun as well.

1. <http://iom.edu/Reports/2009/Local-Government-Actions-to-Prevent-Childhood-Obesity.aspx>. Actual Report: LocalGovernmentActions_ActionGuide_HealthyEating.pdf
2. <http://sph.unc.edu/kids-eating-convenience-foods-are-getting-more-calories-less-nutrition-study-finds/>
3. <http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20100211034900.pdf>

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.⁴ 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 conscience. 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!"

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



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