

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2014 NC Cooperative Extension Macon County

EFNEP Tips Help Struggling Family Become Food Secure

Although the worst of the Great Recession is over, consumers continue to feel its effects. In March 2014, the Consumer Price Index rose due to increases in food and shelter costs. A colder than normal winter plus hikes in beef, milk and vegetable prices caused people to feel the pinch.¹

In Macon County, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) works with families to stretch their food dollars. Conscientious meal planning and conservative grocery shopping can stretch a family's budget. The money saved can pay household bills. Last spring, a WIC mother trying to feed a family of five shared with the EFNEP program assistant her struggle to make ends meet. The family owed over \$400.00 to the electric company. They didn't have the money to pay for both food and the additional heating costs. She needed help.

Upon learning from the mother about her food buying and meal preparation practices, the EFNEP program assistant shared possible ways she could stretch the family's food budget. She discussed ways WIC foods could be used in planning cost-effective yet healthy meals. She also suggested planning meals for two weeks instead of one, using food items already on the kitchen shelves, and shopping with a list. She showed the mother how to economically buy and serve more fruits and vegetables, and use eggs and dried beans instead of costly meat as a main course.

Practicing portion control was another money saving tactic EFNEP taught the mother. Serving large portions added calories to the waistline and dollars to the overall cost of groceries. Large portions that were not eaten would be wasted. Knowing that food wasted by an American family can total approximately \$500 a year, the program assistant taught the mother how to reduce costs even further by creatively planning for leftovers. Recipes that could be made with leftovers were provided.

Upon graduating from EFNEP, the mother shared that she had practiced the cost saving tips offered in class and had already seen results. Stretching her food dollars had saved on food costs and that savings had allowed her to pay the \$400 heating bill in full. In addition, she had been able to nutritionally provide her family with healthy meals that would help reduce doctor's bills. Spring's warmer temperatures were allowing for reduced heating costs so she was putting the money saved on groceries into a rainy day savings account. Having extra money gave her a sense of security she hadn't felt in some time.

1. <http://money.cnn.com/2014/04/15/news/economy/inflation-cpi/>

EFNEP Youth Takes Lessons Home to Decrease Family's Risk of Obesity

Without realizing it, Americans today are challenging the health of their children. Busy families grab fast-food meals and offer fatty, sugary snacks to their kids while allowing them to spend more sedentary time than ever before in front of a TV or computer screen.² Poor eating and physical inactivity have led to weight gain and increased healthcare costs. Today in North Carolina, 31.4% of the children between 10 to 17 years of age are overweight or obese. If poor eating and physical inactivity behaviors remain on course, by 2030 when today's children are adults, that rate will increase to 58%.³ It is projected that health care costs related to these conditions will also rise. Climbing 17.6% over current costs, today's children (tomorrow's adults) will not only suffer from the health complications of overweight and obesity, they will also suffer from the economic costs related to those complications.⁴

In an effort to combat the poor lifestyle behaviors that have promoted this bleak forecast, the Macon County Cooperative Extension Service partnered with local school administrators to deliver the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) to elementary school children in their classrooms. During a series of six lessons, EFNEP facilitated creative hands-on activities and fun food tasting opportunities that taught children how to follow MyPlate recommendations for eating nutritionally sound meals and living physically active lives. The intake of low-calorie fruits and vegetables was stressed because research shows eating these foods as part of a well-balanced eating plan can help one maintain a healthy weight and avoid the health risks associated with overweight and obesity.

Recently, the mother of one 4th grade participant conveyed to the EFNEP program assistant that her daughter returned home after each lesson to share what she had learned. Together, she and her daughter would prepare for the family the recipes tasted during class. As they worked, they placed main ingredients into MyPlate food groups and discussed the nutrients each ingredient provided. As the EFNEP series progressed, her daughter's interest in food preparation transitioned to helping with planning and preparing "balanced" meals for the family.

The mother was amazed by her daughter's sudden interest in healthy eating. She said, "Before participating in EFNEP, my daughter would only eat chicken nuggets, French fries and sweetened soft drinks. She's made a 180° positive change in her diet!" Her daughter was more conscientious about the nutritional content of the foods she ate no matter where they were. "When we go out to eat, she'll ask for vegetable plates instead of fatty or high calorie fast-foods, and she drinks water!" The attention her daughter had given to healthy eating had inspired the entire family to be more conscientious about the foods they ate and drank. Elated, the mother said that high calorie foods and sugar-sweetened sodas, foods and drinks she knew contributed to weight gain, were no longer being offered in her home... and the kids didn't miss them!

But that wasn't all! Because of EFNEP, the family had also increased the amount of time they devoted to physical activity. Her daughter had encouraged everyone to get outside and walk for a few minutes every day. EFNEP had provided tips on how to make their walks fun family adventures instead of a dull form of exercise.

Looking into the future, the mother knew that the healthy lifestyle behaviors taught by EFNEP to one child had helped her entire family reduce the health risks associated with overweight and obesity, and the unnecessary medical costs associated to both, now and in the future.

2. http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/storage/documents/pdfs/afhk_thelearningconnection_digitaledition.pdf

3. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/child-nutrition-programs/usda-fruit-and-vegetable-program.aspx#.U877mYBdUdo>

4. https://www.healthiergeneration.org/_asset/5sf77t/HSP-SS-NC-2013.pdf



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