

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2015 NC Cooperative Extension Ashe County



Healthy Breakfast Is Important for School Success

Over the years, research has provided growing support for the value of eating breakfast. Evidence shared in a compilation of studies has revealed that children who eat breakfast consume more energy in the form of calories and tend to have superior nutrient profiles compared to their breakfast-skipping peers. They are also more likely to stay focused and make better grades in the classroom. These and other convincing results have prompted the Journal of the American Medical Association to advocate that children should eat a healthful breakfast every day. Their breakfast should consist of a variety of foods that include fruits and dairy products, and be especially high in fiber and whole grains.

Doing its part to ensure Ashe County children are learning the importance of eating breakfast, North Carolina Cooperative Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) partners with county schools to deliver a series of six healthy eating lessons as part of their school enrichment programming. One of the six lessons taught focuses on the benefits of eating a healthy breakfast.

During a recent lesson, fourth grade students participated in a hands-on activity that helped them become more aware of the nutritional benefits of eating a healthy breakfast. Using the Nutrition Facts panel from a variety of breakfast cereals, the children looked specifically for whole grain cereals with at least 3 grams of fiber, 6 grams (or less) of sugar, and enough iron to equal 10-25% of their daily recommendation.

When surveyed after the activity, 100% of the 163 fourth graders participating stated they could now competently select healthier breakfast cereals. To challenge their claim, EFNEP asked the students to read cereal labels found in their pantries at home and determine if their family's choices had all the necessary elements to be considered healthy. Upon their return, 75% of students reported that the cereal their families were eating at home met the recommended nutrient requirements. The other 25% admitted their families needed to make some improvements.

One student shared that although he had several cereal choices at home, none met the nutrient requirements! Upon discovering this, he encouraged his family to return to the grocery store to find cereals that were more nutrient dense. He proudly reported his family had followed his suggestion and now they were eating more healthy cereals for breakfast! When asked what his family did with the cereals previously found in the pantry, he replied that so as not to waste them they had decided to include them in small snacks planned throughout the day. However, his family had agreed, once those less healthy cereals were eaten only nutritious cereals would be

Resources:

The effects of breakfast on behavior and academic performance in children and adolescents
Katie Adolphus, Clare L. Lawton, Louise Dye
Front Hum Neurosci. 2013; 7: 425. Prepublished online 2013 June 25. Published online 2013 August 8. doi: 10.3389/fnhum.2013.00425
PMCID: PMC3737458. Retrieved on-line on January 22, 2015 at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3737458/>
J Am Diet Assoc. 2005 May;105(5):743-60; quiz 761-2.
Breakfast habits, nutritional status, body weight, and academic performance in children and adolescents. Rampersaud GC1, Pereira MA, Girard BL, Adams J, Metz J. Retrieved on-line at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15883552> on January 22, 2015.

offered at breakfast and snack time.

Other children also experienced success. As documented in their one-week food diaries, 90% of the children reported eating breakfasts that included a variety of healthy foods. Ashe County schools were pleased. Because of EFNEP, the children were getting the energy and vital nutrients needed to start an academically productive day.

Improved Nutrition Skills Results in Healthy Baby

An expectant mother's nutritional environment can have lasting consequences on her baby's health. Consuming a poor prenatal diet may result in delivering an at-risk baby—one with a birth weight of 5.5 pounds or less. Being born with a low birth weight may lead to health complications during infancy and also be associated with an increased risk of chronic health conditions later in life. While most mothers want to eat a healthy prenatal diet, many do not know what foods will meet their increased nutritional needs, and if they do, they don't know how to properly cook them to ensure their nutrients are retained.

In Ashe County, where 1 in 12 babies are born at-risk, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and the Pregnancy Care Center have partnered to offer classes that help prenatal mothers and fathers become more informed and competent when preparing nutritious meals at home. Participating families are introduced to basic nutrition concepts, meal planning hints, shopping tips, and simple food preparation skills. To ensure they purchase the most nutritious foods on the monies allotted within their food budget, EFNEP teaches them how to read the nutrition facts label and compare prices of like products. In addition, through hands-on food preparation activities, the families practice making easy yet healthy dishes they can duplicate at home after class.

During a recent EFNEP series, it became evident that one couple's implementation of the information gleaned was making a significant difference in their lives. With an age span of approximately 20 years, the couple was starting a new life together. Their decision to participate in EFNEP had been based on wanting to provide the best nutritionally for their unborn baby. They quickly realized that the concepts EFNEP taught were more than just nutrition basics; they were a way of life. As new parents, they were determined their baby would benefit from the EFNEP.

They started incorporating at least one important concept from each lesson into their daily lives. When praised for their accomplishments, the couple responded by stating that prior to participating in EFNEP they hadn't believed healthy foods could be purchased on their nominal food budget. But now, as confident grocery shoppers and meal planners, they were saving money and preparing well-balanced meals at home. Because of this, they knew their baby would be born healthy... and it was! Before the series ended, they delivered a healthy birth-weight baby. Their efforts had reduced the chances of their baby having health complications due to a low birth weight at a young age and significantly lowered the chances of its developing chronic health conditions later in life.

Resource:

<http://www.ncchild.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Ashe.pdf>

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