

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2015 NC Cooperative Extension Columbus County

One Healthy Bite at a Time

Having a picky eater can be a parent's worst nightmare. The dinner table becomes a battleground when the child refuses to eat what's being served and moms can stress over nutrients missing from their child's diet. Picky eating behaviors usually begin appearing during the toddler years, and for some children can linger into grade school and beyond.

Researchers have found that exposing children to a variety of foods can be key to reducing the picky eater quandary. Often, children need to be exposed to a new food at least 10 times before they will try it. Exposure fosters familiarity, and familiarity fosters tasting opportunities. For this reason, elementary school teachers in Columbus County invite the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) into their classrooms every year. EFNEP not only teaches the children MyPlate's basic nutrition concepts, it allows them to become more familiar with and actually taste a variety of different foods, particularly fruits and vegetables.

This year, a particularly stubborn picky eater challenged EFNEP. According to his parents, he had no food allergies or any other health condition that should limit his in-school food encounters. Yet, at age 8, he claimed food made him sick. The only foods he ate were donuts, saltine crackers and pudding because they tasted good. He particularly disliked vegetables.

During each EFNEP lesson, the children have an opportunity to participate in a food preparation, demonstration or tasting experience. In this child's class, a tasting of fresh cucumbers and tomatoes was offered. To make the vegetables more enticing, they were served with a homemade, low-fat yogurt dip.

Assuring his teachers he did not like cucumbers, the picky eater was skeptical about having them placed on his plate. Without coaxing or prodding, the teachers added a dollop of dip. Within seconds the picky eater heard his classmates remark, "Oh, it's so good!" as they bit into their yogurt-dipped cucumbers. Reluctantly, the picky eater took a bite of the serving on his plate. The teachers watched quietly as the picky eater learned, much to his surprise, that he liked them as well! He couldn't wait to share what he'd discovered. He excitedly confirmed, "It is good!" And then asked, "May I have some more, please?"

The teachers were delighted. EFNEP had once again converted a picky eater into a child more open to trying new food options. He will think of this experience every time he is exposed to a new food in the future. Perhaps he will even suggest a creative way to eat an already familiar food. At home, it would mean mealtimes would be more pleasant. There would be no more coaxing or prodding, no more battles at the table. His mother would worry less about his nutrient intake and he would actually enjoy eating with his family... one healthy bite at a time!

References:

<http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/health-nutrition/how-to-handle-picky-eaters.html?referrer=https://www.google.com/#additionalresource>



EFNEP's Kids Get Cooking Helps Young Diabetic

Nutrition education is key in managing diabetes.

That's why a twelve year-old Columbus County girl was thrilled when she learned basic nutrition concepts would be taught in EFNEP's Kids Get Cooking class. She knew the information provided would help her better manage her diabetes. Plus, she could share with her parents what she learned in class. Although she was bilingual, her parents spoke only Spanish. The language barrier had been a challenge to them when trying to learn about and prepare foods that would keep their daughter's blood sugar in line.

Almost immediately, participating in EFNEP's Kids Get Cooking helped to break down several of the barriers this young girl and her family needed to overcome. One of the most difficult was creating a healthy food plan. The doctor had told her parents she needed to be eating a diet limited in sugars and carbohydrates. However, they did not understand how to look for such foods when shopping, nor did they know how to properly prepare those foods once at home.

EFNEP's Kids Get Cooking series, taught the little girl how the Nutrition Facts Label could help. She discovered that the label clearly listed the number of sugar and carbohydrate grams contained in each serving. She quickly realized that by using the Nutrient Facts Label as a guide, she could count the number of sugar and carbohydrate grams in each serving of food she ate throughout the day. Doing so would help control her intake, and subsequently, her blood sugar level. Teaching her parents how to read the Nutrient Facts Label would allow them to make more appropriate food choices at the grocery store, and be more cognizant of ingredients used in the preparation of her food at home. EFNEP recipes provided by the program taught the young girl how to make healthy dishes she could recreate with her parents at home. Incorporating some additional low-sugar tips, she learned how to easily tweak recipes, making them appropriate for diabetics to enjoy.

This Kids Get Cooking EFNEP series taught participants that using basic nutrition knowledge and tools like the Nutrition Facts Label can help families improve their overall health. That was especially evident for the young girl living with diabetes. Since participating in EFNEP, she and her family have worked together to keep her blood sugar levels in line. They now worry less about dealing with extremely high or severely low sugar counts, and more about enjoying healthy food and meaningful family times together. Because of EFNEP, the quality of life for this Columbus County family has greatly improved.

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.

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