



Health and Nutrition Education

Situation:

Improving the health quality of New Hampshire residents through healthy eating and active living helps individuals and families fight against disease, disability, disparities in health status, and even death.

Given rising rates of obesity in the Granite State, UNH Cooperative Extension is committed to looking at ways to optimize the health of the state's residents by reducing risk factors through education focused on encouraging physical exercise and diet/healthy lifestyle choices. Individual, group and community coalitions are all ways to get important messages and education to the public. In addition, low income individuals have higher rates of overweight and obesity.

Given Belknap County's economic reliance on tourism, UNH Cooperative Extension programs that address public health issues such as food safety have become increasingly important. According to the National Restaurant Association, for every \$1 spent in NH restaurants, an additional \$.84 in sales is generated for the economy.

UNH Cooperative Extension's Response:

The nutrition and health programming in New Hampshire is implemented by UNH Cooperative Extension's Nutrition Connections Program, Family and Consumer Resources and 4-H Youth Development staff. Activities target physical activity, nutrition, community involvement and obesity awareness and prevention. The Nutrition Connections Program's mandate is to work with limited income adults, youth and families. Programming is evaluated with a pre/post survey and an analysis of foods eaten prior to and after a series of lessons.

Food safety education is offered to local food service workers through both the SERVSAFE® national certification program and the SAFE (Safety Awareness in the Food Environment) workshop. Four SERVSAFE® programs were offered to restaurant workers in Belknap County in the past two years, completed by 32 participants. The Safety Awareness in the Food Environment (SAFE) program (a two-hour, free program) targets front line food service workers who frequently do not have access to the national certification program due to cost and time requirements. This program was offered 7 times by Sue Cagle, Extension Educator in Family and Consumer Resources and attended by 126 participants from Belknap County in 2008.

How We Made a Difference:

Research has documented the effectiveness of this program for increasing the nutritional well-being of the families it serves. A national survey in 2007 showed that 92% of those "graduating" from these programs improved their dietary intake. This included an increase of about 1.4 servings per day of fruits and vegetables.

Nutrition Connections, through the national Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), saves states and families money. Multiple cost benefit analyses in several states highlight the value of the program and document that for every dollar invested in EFNEP, benefits can reach as high as \$10.64 from reduced health care costs. Another study showed that for every \$1 to implement the program, \$2.48 is saved on food expenditures, reducing the need for emergency food assistance.

In Belknap County, 337 youth and 260 adults with 521 family members participated in Nutrition Connections programming during the program year 2007-2008. This includes one-time classes as well as people enrolled in a series of classes.

Data from pre/post surveys for adults taking a series of lessons indicate the following percentage of adults changed their behavior after they completed Nutrition Connections classes in 2007-2008:

- Overall, 85% of the adults who took a series of classes (usually 5-6 lessons), showed improvement in one or more nutrition practices. These include planning meals, comparing prices, not running out of food before the end of the month and shopping with a grocery list.
- Overall, 88% showed improvement in at least one of the following: making healthy food choices, preparing foods without adding salt, reading nutrition labels and making sure their children ate breakfast.
- Overall, 60% showed improvement in food safety such as thawing and/or storing foods properly. Food safety is critical to avoiding food borne illness. Food borne illness can result in days lost from work or from school and increased health care costs.
- 62% increased their fruit and vegetable consumption. There are many positive health indicators associated with increasing fruit and vegetable consumption.
- 48% increased their physical activity. Evidence shows that increasing physical activity results in better physical and emotional health, meaning fewer illnesses.
- 60% more often compared prices when shopping. This shows they are making smarter financial decisions and enhancing their skills with their cash/food stamps. This can result in less reliance on local resources.
- 31% less often ran out of food before the end of the month. Having food available means that households will have less demand for city welfare and food pantries.
- 30% reported their children ate breakfast more often. Data shows children do better in school if they eat breakfast.

Data from pre/post food recalls from adults taking a series of lessons indicates:

- Overall, 91% showed a positive change in their diet.

Teacher feedback from Belknap County schools is extremely exciting and positive. A few of the student changes observed by teachers include:

- Students are eating more fruits and vegetables.
- Students are eating breakfast more often.
- Students are going home and “teaching” their families about what they have learned.
- Students are making better choices at the grocery stores.
- Students are reading labels.
- Students are bringing healthier snacks from home.

Overall, people who participate in Nutrition Connections programming in Belknap County are making improved health/nutrition choices for themselves and their families. The implications to making smart nutrition choices are financial, emotional and physical. Nutrition Connections helps people learn how to become more self reliant and more independent. We provide the education to people so they have the tools, awareness and knowledge to make healthier choices.

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