

## Family Living Programs

### Lower Income Families Learn about Nutritious Meals and Snacks

#### Situation

Poor diet and lack of physical activity are significant contributing factors to four of the 10 leading causes of death in the United States. Improving American dietary and physical activity patterns could reduce the occurrence of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cancer.

In 2001, nine percent of Wisconsin residents were living in poverty, and over 365,000 people were relying on Food Stamps to help feed themselves and their families. Low-income individuals and families tend to have poorer quality diets and less extensive knowledge about ways to improve the nutritional quality of their diets than individuals and families with more financial resources.

#### Response

The goal of the Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program (WNEP) is to involve Food Stamp-eligible residents in education that increases the likelihood that they will make healthy food choices within a limited budget that are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Food Guide Pyramid. This education takes place through community-based nutrition education programming for youth, adults and older adults in a variety of locations.

During 2001-2002, 17 of the 38 WNEP projects coordinated evaluation of their nutrition education, primarily with adult audiences. These 17 projects together reached 1,998 limited income persons with particular topics over the year. Specifically, 98 adults and 49 youth ages 12-17 participated in learning about choosing foods with less fat when eating in "fast food" restaurants; 607 parents of young children participated in learning about helping their children choose nutritious snacks; and 1,244 older adults participated in a series of general nutrition lessons over an average nine-month time period.

#### Outcomes

In counties across Wisconsin, WNEP Educators provide education to help improve dietary quality among lower income individuals and families. Some of these efforts include:

- **Choosing nutritious foods when eating away from home.** Educators reached 98 adults with a lesson about choosing foods with less fat when eating in "fast food" restaurants. Pre- and post-evaluations showed that participants were able to reduce the fat content of their menu choices by an average of 22 grams of fat per meal. At the end of the lesson, 77 percent were able to list at least one change they are willing to make when they eat in fast food restaurants. Some changes they identified include: choosing foods that are fat-free or lower in fat (i.e., ketchup or mustard instead of mayonnaise, sauces, or gravies; grilled, broiled, steamed or baked foods instead of fried) and choosing smaller portions.

Educators also reached 49 youth ages 12-17 years with this lesson. At the end of the lesson, 90 percent of participants were able to list at least one change they are willing to make when they eat in fast food restaurants. Some changes they identified include: choosing grilled, broiled, steamed

or baked foods instead of fried; burritos instead of tacos or taco salads; and choosing smaller portions (i.e., regular instead of 'super-size').

- **Choosing nutritious snacks for growing children.** Educators reached 506 parents with a lesson about helping their children choose nutritious snacks. After the lesson, 34 percent of those participating in an evaluation (n=446) reported that they would try more often to make sure healthful foods are available for their children to eat as snacks. Approximately half (52%) of respondents reported that they already do this most of the time.

About 100 adults participated in a series of lessons on choosing and preparing healthful snacks for their children. After the lessons, 79 of the participants answered questions about the snacks they feed their children. All of the respondents reported that they sometimes (72%) or always (28%) make healthful foods available for their children to eat for snacks since participating in the lessons.

- **Older adults choosing and preparing nutritious meals and snacks.** Educators reported reaching 1,244 older adults with a series of nutrition lessons over an average nine-month period. Lesson topics included choosing a healthful diet, eating plenty of fruits and vegetables, eating plenty of breads and other grain products, choosing and preparing foods with less fat and sugar, and balancing food eaten with physical activity. At the end of the nine months, 70 percent said that they could think of one specific thing they are doing differently as a result of the lessons. For example:
  - "I switched from whole...to skim milk after learning they both have the same amount of calcium. I did it gradually like you suggested. My heart doctor...said it was one of the healthiest choices I've made."
  - "I decreased the total amount of food that I eat, after your demonstration on...serving size. Now when my friend and I go to a restaurant, we share one meal. We both lost a few pounds."
  - "It was hard for me to (eat fruits and vegetables)...I can't cut them up because (of) my arthritis. After you said the canned and frozen fruits and vegetables are just as nutritious, I started eating both canned and frozen. It really made a difference in how I felt."
  - "I read the labels on bread packages now. I thought I was eating whole grain bread all the time until you told me that a whole grain flour had to be listed first on the label."
  - "I have been using some of the low fat cooking techniques you have suggested."
  - "I take a walk with my neighbor three times a week now."

## Contact

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