



Nutrition for Family Living

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February, 2002 Topics

Research: Parents serve as role models for eating fruits and vegetables

For your use ...

Research: New Concepts for Nutrition Education in an Era of Welfare Reform

Sherry's holiday functional food: CHOCOLATE???

Parents serve as role models for eating fruits and vegetables

A study conducted at Penn State confirms that children eat more fruits and vegetables when their parents eat more fruits and vegetables.

Parents influence their children's food preferences and eating habits by the foods they make available, the feeding practices they use, and their own eating behavior. Parents who try to force their children to eat may actually interfere with the child's own ability to regulate their food intake. This study evaluated parents' eating behaviors and whether they pressured their child to eat, and the relationship between those behaviors and their 5-year-old daughters' fruit and vegetable intakes.

One hundred ninety-one girls and their parents participated in the study. The majority of the girls consumed 3 or fewer servings of fruits and vegetables per day, and their parents consumed an average of only 2 servings per day. Most parents in this study reported a low level of pressure on their children to eat.

This study found that:

- Parents who consumed more fruits and vegetables had daughters who consumed more fruits and vegetables.
- Parents who ate fewer fruits and vegetables reported using more pressure in child feeding.
- Girls who ate the most fruits and vegetables had parents who ate many fruits and vegetables and also used less pressure in feeding their children.
- Girls who received more pressure to eat tended to eat fewer fruits and vegetables and have lower vitamin and mineral intakes overall.
- Girls who ate more fruits and vegetables had higher vitamin and mineral intakes and lower fat intakes.

Implications for educators:

- When educating families about increasing children's fruit and vegetable intake, it's important to target parents' own intake and the behaviors they use in getting their children to eat.
- Research shows family dinners provide an important opportunity for children to observe their parents' eating behaviors and food preferences, especially since adults consume most of their fruits and vegetables at dinner. Encouraging fruits and vegetables for all family members at dinner may directly and indirectly improve children's intakes.



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- Similarities between parents' and children's intakes may represent children's exposure to the fruits and vegetables parents prefer and bring home. Make use of parents as models by encouraging everyone in the family to try new foods. Help families to develop healthy eating habits as a group, rather than focusing on only children or only parents.
- Remind parents that they are important role models for their children and "the best way to get them to do what you want is to do it yourself." It's also important for parents to provide a united front; it's important for fathers as well as mothers to show healthy eating habits and behaviors.

Fisher JO, Mitchell DC, Smiciklas-Wright H, Lipps Birch L. Parental influences on young girls fruit and vegetable, micronutrient, and fat intakes. *J Am Diet Assoc.* 2002;102:58-64.

For ideas on eating more fruits and vegetables: www.5aday.com, www.5aday.gov (note two separate websites with similar addresses), www.aboutproduce.com



For your use...

This article is written for consumers. Feel free to include it in newsletters or other written materials intended for the public.

Parents serve as role models for eating fruits and vegetables

Parents influence their children's food preferences and eating habits by the foods they buy, the feeding practices they use, and their own eating behavior. Parents who try to force their children to eat find that it usually doesn't work in the long run, and may even have the opposite effect.

A study conducted at Penn State confirms that children eat more fruits and vegetables when their parents eat more fruits and vegetables. The researchers found that most of the girls in the study consumed 3 or fewer servings of fruits and vegetables per day, and their parents consumed an average of only 2 servings per day. Experts recommend a minimum of 5 servings of fruits and vegetables each day for children and adults.

The researchers found that:

- Parents who ate more fruits and vegetables had daughters who ate more fruits and vegetables.
- Parents who ate fewer fruits and vegetables put more pressure on their children to eat.
- Girls who ate the most fruits and vegetables had parents who ate many fruits and vegetables and also used less pressure to get their children to eat.
- Girls who received more pressure to eat tended to eat fewer fruits and vegetables and have lower vitamin and mineral intakes overall.
- Girls who ate more fruits and vegetables had higher vitamin and mineral intakes and lower fat intakes.

Recommendations for parents:

- If you want your children to eat more fruits and vegetables, eat more yourself!
- Family dinners are an important time for your children to observe your eating behaviors and food preferences, especially since adults consume most of their fruits and vegetables at dinner. Encouraging fruits and vegetables for everyone at dinner may help children eat more of them.
- Children eat like you do because they learn to like the foods that you make familiar and available to them. Be a positive role model by trying and enjoying new foods yourself. Help your family to develop healthy eating habits as a group, rather than focusing only on your children or only on your own eating habits.
- It's important for parents to provide a united front. It's important for fathers as well as mothers to show healthy eating habits and behaviors.

Here are some ways you can help your family eat more fruits and vegetables:

- Pack one fruit and one vegetable in both your child's lunch and your lunch.
- Serve and eat at least one fruit and one vegetable at dinner.
- Have fresh, frozen and canned fruits and vegetables available home – they are all nutritious.
- Encourage everyone to have a fruit or vegetable for a snack, instead of something else, once a day.



Research: New Concepts for Nutrition Education in an Era of Welfare Reform

The following is a summary of a very interesting and well-written article in the *Journal of Nutrition Education*. If you enjoy pondering these sorts of ideas, this article is worth reading in its entirety. – BK

Scholars predict that welfare reform will increase the challenge of providing nutrition education for low-income groups. New approaches to nutrition education may be necessary as clients become harder to reach, new problems and priorities are created for clients, and as funding is restricted for nutrition education. The objective of FSNEP is to improve the diets of food stamp recipients through nutrition education efforts that increase self-sufficiency. The focus on self-sufficiency is particularly relevant to welfare reform and forms the basis of one new approach to designing nutrition education interventions.

Concepts

If the goal of an educational intervention is **self-sufficiency**, a successful strategy will allow people to choose the knowledge, express the ideas, and identify the issues that are important in their own lives. People can develop their internal resources and potential for self-reliance by helping to decide what and how they will learn. This can be difficult for an educator to facilitate because it requires the educator to be more flexible and work with many plans at the same time. It can be difficult for participants as well if they are not accustomed to directing their own learning or feel they don't have adequate support. To encourage participation, planning for nutrition education programs might benefit from greater emphasis on appreciating people as they are, allowing participants to build on what they need and know, creating group support, and building trust.

Empowerment is related to self-sufficiency. Empowerment is the idea of feeling able to act on the forces in one's life to improve one's life or level of satisfaction. Some say that powerlessness, rather than poverty, is a root cause of malnutrition.

Social support and social capital affect health by mediating stress and increasing a person's sense of control. Social capital refers to the resources stored in human relationships. Using social capital, for example by calling on a friend for help, generates more social capital because the friend then feels they could ask for help in return. Reciprocity and use of the social capital system builds more social capital and builds trust. The system disintegrates if trust is undermined or if people are unwilling or unable to use social capital.

Assets-based development involves focusing on a community's strengths, not just its needs, in developing programming. Existing social capital can be a strength that can then be used to address individuals' needs for building self-sufficiency.

Nutrition Education for Self-Reliance

The authors of this article used these concepts in working with a group of 17 FSNEP participants in New York. Participants were asked if they felt they knew how to perform various food-related activities and whether they would be willing to teach them to others, cooperate in joint projects, and/or learn more about the activities. Responses showed that it would be possible to engage almost all the participants in an activity of interest to them if there was an option of sharing their existing knowledge with others. On the other hand, if the only option was having an educator



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teach about the topics, more than half of the participants were not interested. The survey also showed that there was the potential for matching unexpected skills and interests, such as mentoring pregnant teens. These skills and the participants' willingness to share them is a type of social capital.

The objectives of the assets-based approach these authors recommend are:

- To use and validate the skills of food stamp recipients
- To increase nutrition knowledge and improve food practices through peer education
- To increase social support and social capital by linking participants to each other and to community resources.

The important principle is that activities should be based on participants' interests, trusts, and assets, emphasizing what they want to share rather than what they are assumed to need. It would be important to sequence activities so that the participants have the necessary resources at the time they need them, and would be able to build more. For example, an early activity might be a home visit which requires less networking and fewer assets on the part of the participant than a later activity such as group gardening, which requires more networking and trust but invests more social capital back into the system. Building social capital encourages participants to develop self-reliance and to share in the collective resources of their social system to meet their needs. This approach to designing activities for FSNEP requires nutrition educators to be more flexible, less directive, more responsive to participants' strengths and needs, and emphasizes listening, networking and facilitation. The anticipated benefit is that participants would come away with links to social support networks to encourage self-reliance.

Implications for Educators

With these concepts in mind, Extension educators can examine their approaches to planning and teaching to find ways to help learners build self-reliance:

- *What will you teach?* Whenever possible, ask learners in advance what subjects they would like to learn more about. If the topics fit within program guidelines, use their preferences to plan your teaching. If it's too late to change your plans for this session, use the information in making plans for similar groups in the future.
- *What can learners share?* Much of our teaching in Extension is already participatory. Are there other ways you can encourage learners to share their skills and strengths with each other?
- *What social support systems can learners use?* Whether it's neighbors sharing garden produce, or sisters sharing tips for shopping on a budget, there are many ways people can give and receive help from others. Ask learners to help others in the group come up with new ideas.
- *What do learners think are their community's strengths and needs?* This information may give you new insight into future topics and directions for educational programs.

Arnold CG, et al. New Concepts for Nutrition Education in an Era of Welfare Reform. *J Nutr Educ.* 2001;33:341-346.



Sherry's holiday functional food: CHOCOLATE???

Throughout the ages, chocolate has been called the “food of the gods” and “mortals' medicine.” Many have considered chocolate as a “cure for humanity.” Chocolate is not only important during holidays in many cultures, but many people enjoy it every day. Chocolate has been shown to elicit a neurological response and with many individuals this response can occur *before* it is consumed. While both genders have been known to crave chocolate, women usually crave it more than men. While the craving seems to be linked to women's normal hormonal cycling, even dosing with the hormone progesterone does not seem to lessen the chocolate cravings.

Chocolate has been used as a medicine throughout history. The following are considered consistent roles:

- To treat emaciated patients to gain weight.
- To stimulate nervous systems of apathetic, exhausted or feeble patients.
- To improve digestion and elimination by countering the effects of stagnant or weak stomachs, stimulating kidneys and improving bowel function.

Many of the benefits that have been associated with chocolate are most likely myths and have not been clearly substantiated in the literature. Chocolate has been claimed:

- To reduce fatigue.
- To increase the quantity of breast milk.
- To reduce general female complaints.
- To delay the growth of white hair.
- To reduce infections.
- To improve the probability of conception.
- To reduce heart pain.
- To reduce the effects of hangover.
- To reduce hemorrhoids.
- To control or reduce flatus.

What is in chocolate to make it a legitimate topic of research? Chocolate contains the following substances of interest to research scientists:

- Procyanidins
- Anandamines
- Caffeine
- Phenylethylamine
- Magnesium

Many of these substances are present in very small amounts and therefore probably are not able to elicit a biological response. One of these sets of compounds, procyanidins, is a class of proanthocyanidins which are known to be potent antioxidants of the flavonoid family. Some researchers claim that this puts chocolate into the “functional food” category because this class of flavonoids is unique to very few foods. On the other hand, chocolate as prepared in the United



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States contains a lot of sugar and fat. For instance, 60% of the calories in a dark chocolate valentine heart are from fat and 38% are from sugars. Unfortunately, this places it in the tip of the Food Guide Pyramid. While many of us wish that it was on the bottom of the pyramid, moderation is the key in having chocolate as part of a healthy diet.

If you would like to know more about chocolate's many functions, the following resource contains information on both the history and current research topics: *The Journal of Nutrition*, August 2000 supplement, "Chocolate: modern science investigates an ancient medicine."
