“Healthy Living A to Z” Impact Program Cycle Ends Successfully as Curriculum Use Continues!

From 1998 -- 2003, “Healthy Living A to Z” reached 2,554 Oklahomans—998 youth and 1,566 adults! Twenty-four OCES Family & Consumer Sciences Educators, State and District Specialists, collaborated to design curriculum, teach Oklahomans, and measure participants’ behavior change.

Improved dietary behaviors may prevent 20% of annual deaths from diet related health conditions. Increased consumption of fruits and vegetables can help reduce risk of diet related health conditions such as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes & some types of cancer, and are cost-effective approach to lower disease risk and reduce health care costs!

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 80% of Oklahomans eat fewer than five fruit and vegetable servings per day. Occasional outbreaks of foodborne disease associated with fruits and vegetables are one barrier to adequate consumption. According to the CDC, 20% of all traceable foodborne disease outbreaks result from improper handling of foods in the home including poor sanitation, improper hygiene and cross contamination.

“Healthy Living A to Z” had 19 lessons on fruits and vegetables incorporating a “5-A-Day” message (fruit and vegetable intake), food preparation skills, food safety and nutrition education, taught as a series of lessons.

Statistically significant dietary improvements were observed, including:

- **24% increase in consuming recommended 2 fruit servings per day**, with participants’ average number of fruit servings increasing from 1.4 to 2.1 servings per day
- **18% increase in consuming recommended 3 vegetable servings per day**, with participants’ average number of vegetable servings increasing from 1.8 to 2.5 servings per day

Statistically significant increases in eating new fruits or vegetables and trying new fruit or vegetable preparation methods were observed among participants including:

- **25% increase in “eating a new fruit or vegetable in the last two weeks”**
- **30% increase in “preparing fruits or vegetables in a new way in the last two weeks”**

Additional statistically significant improvements were observed in food handling practices among participants:

- **22% increase in “hand washing” behavior**
- **17% increase in “washing fresh fruits and vegetables” behavior**
- **19% increase in “using a separate cutting board for fruits and vegetables to avoid cross contamination” behavior**

Collectively, these outcomes represent improvements in health status and decreased risk for heart disease, stroke, diabetes and certain types of cancer, and a likely reduction in incidence of foodborne illnesses.

Other program successes include a 2004 Master of Science thesis, “Teaching Healthy Living A to Z”, by team member Marlene Buck, FCS Educator in Garfield County, studying team members’ teaching techniques, audiences, promotional methods, successes and challenges. According to Ms. Buck, “Extension Educators included demonstrations, hands-on activities for participants & lecture, with 92% of team members using two or more techniques.” She also reported:

- 100% of team members incorporated “tasting” foods featured in lessons as part of teaching
- Networking with team members, other educators and non-OCES persons was a key part of the program’s success.
- Participants were diverse groups, primarily in age ranges “over 50” and “under 18.” Food stamp recipients and diabetes support groups were among groups taught.

“A surprising outcome,” says Ms. Buck, “is that nearly half (46%) of team members held lessons at their own expense—primarily the costs associated to providing participants with food tasting experiences.”

Program Recognition: Nat’l Kraft Foods Award, 2001 National Extension Assn. of Family and Consumer Sciences; at National Conference “Healthy Living A-Z” Team Curriculum Committee (Mary Selk, Linda Murray, Cathy James, Dorothy Gibson, Janet Kleeman, and Ranel Lasley) presented a concurrent session! Curriculum is offered to Extension staff at an affordable price & widely used in Oklahoma and many other states!


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