

IMPACT

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Meal Time in Less Time Improves Attitudes and Behaviors for Healthy Meal Planning

The Situation

In the last 10 years, obesity rates have increased by more than 60% among Americans. A majority of Idahoans (59%) are overweight and many (23%) are obese, making Idaho 29th in the nation for highest obesity rate. Obesity is defined as an abnormal accumulation of body fat, 20% or more over an individual's ideal body weight. Other factors associated with obesity include inactivity and poor nutrition which reduces life expectancy as well as decreases quality of life for Idahoans of all ages.

Studies show by improving eating habits and increasing physical activity, obesity and other chronic diseases can be reduced. Healthy diets eaten at home can delay or prevent long term illness. Teens that ate at least seven family meals at home a week ate fewer snack foods in their overall diet. Researchers say family meals may work in a variety of ways to help protect teens from negative influences. Family meals may: provide a formal or informal "check in" time for parents to tune into their children's emotional well being; reflect a greater proportion of supervised time and reduce opportunities to engage in risky behavior, and spend more time at home away from negative peer influences.



Our Response

The University of Idaho Health and Nutrition Topic Team has developed a curriculum on meal planning and food preparation. Barbara Abo, Extension Educator taught this three-lesson curriculum called *Meal Time in Less Time* in Ada County, while other educators taught the curriculum in Twin Falls, Bannock, and Bonneville Counties.

Individuals and families were taught how to plan quick and healthy meals, shop to save time and money, and prepare healthy meals in less time.

Idahoans' busy lifestyle has shifted meal time from the family home and dinner table to eating in restaurants or on the run such as in the car. Adults attending this program were taught skills relating to menu planning and healthy food selection that will provide youth and others in the home, at risk for obesity, with a nutritious eating plan.

Participants learned they can save time and money, improve nutritional value of meals, and reduce stress by knowing what to serve for meals with a menu plan. Additionally, families learned healthy substitutions to use with recipe makeovers, how to increase fiber and use less sugar and sodium.

Program Outcomes

A post/pre-survey was given to 59 adult participants at the end of each of the lessons. One to three months later, a follow-up survey was completed by 38 participants. Participants indicated attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors using a five point Likert scale. Each point was assigned a number (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). The responses were averaged. A higher average indicates more agreement with attitudes/beliefs or performance of behaviors. A paired sample t-test was run to see if there was a difference between the responses. Responses were compared from pre-lesson to post lesson, pre-lesson to follow-up, and post lesson to follow-up. Participants projected highly significant differences between attitudes and behaviors from before the lessons to after lessons and the follow-up.

The compiled statewide responses to the post behavior survey were 92.2% female and 7.8% male; age span ranged from ages 18 to 60+, the largest group of respondents (30.6%) was ages 30 to 39. Minority audiences represented 3.2% of the respondents.

The results of the survey showed that program participants significantly changed most attitudes and behaviors as a result of the program. For example, the importance of planning meals increased throughout the lessons and was higher after the follow-up survey. Similarly, adding whole grains, fruits, vegetables and dairy products to meals is a behavioral change that participants are now using in meal planning.

Furthermore, when participants were surveyed two months later, many attitude and behavior changes were still in place, i.e. scores were equal to their post workshop scores. See chart for scores for two of the indicators.

Measuring Attitude and Behavior Change Before, After, and Follow-up

	Pre	Post	Follow-up
I think it is important to plan meals	3.62	4.56	4.70
I add whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and dairy products to my meals	3.24	4.53	4.45*

*Likert Scale 1 = strongly disagree
5 = strongly agree

This curriculum is an effective method of teaching healthy lifestyles to adults. As a result of attending *Meal Time in Less Time* participants increased knowledge and had positive behavior changes.

For More Information

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