The Senior Extension Nutrition Program: Proven Success in Seniors’ Nutritional Status

The Situation
Older adults benefit from good nutritional status; their health is improved, they have a decrease in morbidity and mortality, hospitalization stays and time required to recuperate from an illness is reduced, and utilization of health care resources are minimized. Yet with age comes an increased chance of becoming dependent on others for help in performing activities of daily living. Chronic illnesses or conditions such as arthritis, osteoporosis, hypertension, heart disease, and diabetes can limit mobility making buying, cooking, and preparing meals appropriate for their condition difficult and confusing.

Our Response
University of Idaho’s Senior Extension Nutrition Program (SENP) was created in 2002 in response to Area Agency on Aging’s (AAA) need to better serve their high-nutritional risk seniors. With funding from AAA, SENP uses Nutrition Advisors to offer in-home lessons to seniors in the educational areas of nutrition and food safety. Seniors receive a minimum of six home visits from a Nutrition Advisor. Educational lessons may include:
• The affects of aging on nutritional needs.
• The importance of mini-meals.
• Health effects of fiber and dehydration.
• The health benefits of eating fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain foods.
• How to make eating alone a pleasant experience.
• Managing diabetes using the plate method.
• Fall prevention measures.

Since September 2002, SENP has worked with 278 seniors with 160 graduates. Nutrition Advisors have taught over 2,254 lessons.
Program Outcomes

Table 1: Outcome Scores and Significance using Retrospective Pretest and Posttest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you eat 2 or more cups of fruit per day?</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do you eat 2 ½ or more servings of vegetables per day?</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do you drink or eat 3 or more cups of milk, yogurt, cheese or other calcium rich food per day?</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you drink 8 - 1 cup servings of water each day?</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do you understand how to use food to better manage your health or health condition?</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How many times a day do you eat?</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Time:</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Times:</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Times:</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Times:</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+ Times:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Future
University of Idaho Extension is in its final phases of writing Healthy Eating, Healthy Aging, a curricula designed for SENP.

Additionally, University of Idaho Extension Kootenai County will continue to pursue yearly funding from Area Agency on Aging of North Idaho to offer the Senior Extension Nutrition Program.

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