



“Seafood at its best” curriculum helps consumers make informed decisions

The Situation

Americans do not eat enough seafood to obtain the heart healthy benefits that seafood offers. The American Heart Association recommends that adults eat at least 2 meals of seafood per week. Since 2008 per capita consumption of seafood has averaged 16 pounds per year (National Marine Fisheries Service). This is only 61.5% of the recommended 26 pounds per capita per year that Americans should be eating to reduce the risk of mortality from coronary heart disease.

Low seafood consumption can be explained in part by concerns and confusion about seafood safety, handling, and cooking. Many of these concerns result from inaccurate and sensationalized media reports. American consumers also are confused by conflicting information from governmental agencies and private organizations. Lack of knowledge and confidence in selecting and preparing seafood are often reasons for low consumption.

Our Response

Extension Educators in Twin Falls County developed a curriculum to help consumers feel more confident about buying and preparing seafood. The goal of the curriculum is to increase participants knowledge about seafood; often poorly understood in terms of selection, handling, storing, preparation, health benefits, and actual risks relative to perceived risks. Three seafood classes were held.

Increased knowledge can lead to better informed consumers and increased seafood consumption. Factors that influence consumers selecting seafood are similar to choices of other foods, such as taste, price, convenience, or ease of preparation.

Consumers of seafood do not think they have enough information about seafood (Hicks et al. 2008. *Journal of Foodservice*, Volume 19 Issue 4). The curriculum addresses these concerns. The four-lesson “Seafood at its best” curriculum covers the following topics:

1. What is Seafood?
2. Health benefits of eating seafood.
3. Seafood-borne illnesses and risks of eating seafood.
4. Seafood tips (selecting, buying, handling, storing and cooking seafood).

The curriculum materials consist of an introduction for the instructor, lecture notes providing an introduction for each lesson, suggested activities, a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson, references for additional information and evaluation tools.

Program Outcomes

Forty participants attended the “Seafood at its best” classes. A pre- and post-test was administered before and after each lesson. Pre- and post-test results showed a significant increase in knowledge gained (see Figure 1). Post-test scores improved over pre-test scores by 73%, 47%, 64%, and 40% respectively for lessons one, two, three, and four.

When asked what ideas they will put into practice class participants stated increased consumption of seafood to at least 2 to 3 times per week, adding seafood meals to their weekly menus, implementation of proper handling and storage methods for seafood, and evaluation of seafood counters for properly cooled (iced) displays, no cross-contamination of cooked and raw products, and evaluation of overall appearance of the display.

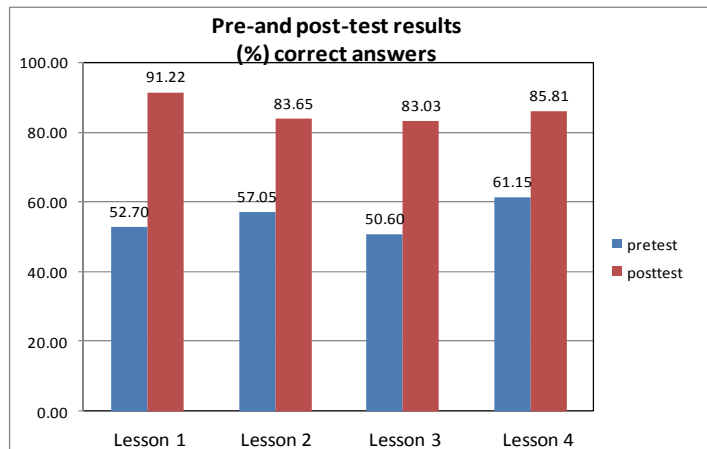


Figure 1. Pre-and post-test results.

This program was well attended and successful from the standpoint of knowledge gained. Many positive comments and thanks were given by the participants at the conclusion of the program. One participant said, "I learned so much and hope to apply this knowledge with my friends and family through cooking seafood." Another stated, "...you did an outstanding job instructing me in a subject I found I knew little about."

The Future

The curriculum will be available soon for Family and Consumer Sciences Educators to implement in their nutrition programs. This program will be offered in future years throughout Idaho and beyond. Feedback from participants indicates a desire for more recipes. An analysis of the questions incorrectly answered on the pre- and post-tests suggests that future classes should emphasize proper handling and cooking of seafood.

References

Hicks, D., L. Pivarnik and R. McDermott. 2008. Consumer perceptions about seafood - an Internet survey. *Journal of Foodservice*. Volume 19 issue 4. pages 213-226.

National Marine Fisheries Service
<http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1>

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