Living a Lowfat Lifestyle is Healthy and Easy to Do

The Situation
The average American gets 35 - 40 percent of their daily calories from fat. The average teen-ager gets 40 - 60 percent of their daily calories from fat. High fat diets are almost always high caloric diets. Dietary fat intake causes serum cholesterol levels to increase. High blood cholesterol levels contribute to coronary heart disease. High fat/high caloric diets also lead to obesity, increased cancer and diabetes risk. Coronary heart disease and cancer are the two leading cause of death in Idaho.

Our Response
From a 1989 survey done by four District IV Extension Educators we know that people are fairly knowledgeable about dietary fat and cholesterol. Eight three percent of those surveyed knew that foods high in saturated fat would increase serum cholesterol levels. Over 70 percent knew which foods were high in fat and cholesterol. Although they had a high level of knowledge forty percent of the males and 28 percent of the females still had high fat consumption scores.

We know that people want to be healthy. They want to eat right and feed their families a healthy diet. Also, most people have the knowledge to make the right choices. As I talked to people I found there were some deterrents to changing to a lower fat diet. These were: 1) Cooking and eating patterns are ingrained and very difficult to change so people don’t do it unless a situation becomes life threatening; 2) People are eating out more often and low fat choices are not always easy to make at restaurants and delis; 3) Low fat foods are often more costly and may take more preparation time and 4) Without fat foods have a different flavor and textures. This is unacceptable to many people.

The goals set for this program were to: 1) Increase awareness about the correlation between fat and calories. 2) Increase knowledge about where fat is found in food. 3) Show that low fat cooking does not always mean making major changes in eating and cooking habits. 4) Show that quality of food can be maintained when amounts of fat are decreased. 5) Have people make one or two changes in their diet that will result in a lower dietary fat intake.

Using a set of slides called Lowfat Lifeline a program was developed showing homemakers and college students how to cut the fat in their diet by making small simple changes in their eating habits. The concepts taught were: 1) Use low fat dairy products; 2) Cut the amount of margarine or butter used on bread, toast, sandwiches, vegetables, etc.; 3) Trim the visible fat from meats, skim the broth and skin the chicken; 4) Use low fat salad dressings and mayonnaise; and 5) Cut the amount of fat called for in recipes for baked products.
Achievements
Over 600 individuals attended workshop sessions on Living a Lowfat Lifestyle during 1994-1995.

Evaluation through post tests and through visiting with people about the changes they have made indicate that about 85% of them have already made some changes in their diet that would lower their dietary fat intake.

The most common change is using a lower fat milk - usually 2%. About 25% have started to use 1% or skim milk regularly in their diets. Nearly 50% are trimming visible fat from meats before cooking and most of those people indicated they would also skin the chicken before cooking. There was a major change in people’s attitude about skinning the chicken after they realized that two-thirds of the calories are in the skin and fatty deposits around the skin.

About twenty five percent of those surveyed indicated they would be willing to cut the amount of fat in their baked goods since there was no apparent change in the quality. About twenty five percent indicated they would use low fat salad dressings and mayonnaise and about ten percent were willing to give up the butter or margarine on their bread or toast.

If people can vividly see the amount of calories they can cut from their diet and if cutting those calories does not mean making major changes in their eating habits and cooking habits most people are ready to make some changes in their fat consumption.

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