



EFNEP: Nutrition Education for Families

How do I choose and prepare food that is healthy? How can I afford what I need and want for my family? How can I reduce my family's health risks?

These questions are especially challenging for low-resource families. Iowa State University Extension helps answer them by working with families through the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), a proven cost-effective nutrition education program.

What is EFNEP?

EFNEP funding has come to Iowa through the U.S. Department of Agriculture for more than 35 years. EFNEP helps youth and young, low-resource families develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior needed to improve their diet. Families learn to make informed choices about low-cost, nutritious foods; to better manage family finances; and to become more self-sufficient.

What do EFNEP participants learn?

Through an experiential learning process, adult program participants learn how to make good choices to improve the nutritional quality of the meals they serve their families. They participate in a series of at least eight lessons based on the *MyPyramid* and the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. The hands-on, learn-by-doing approach allows the participants to gain the practical skills necessary to make positive behavior changes. They increase their ability to select and buy food that meets the nutritional needs of their families and they gain new skills in food preparation, storage, safety, and sanitation. They also learn to better manage food budgets, including the use of Food Stamps and WIC coupons.

The youth EFNEP program provides six hours of nutrition education to help children develop healthy

eating patterns and skills in preparing nutritious meals and snacks. The youth EFNEP program emphasizes a variety of delivery modes for reaching youth, from traditional classroom settings and after-school programs during the school year to day camps and youth group activities during the summer. The youth curriculum emphasizes learning by experience and reflection, and is adaptable to a wide variety of educational settings.

Does EFNEP make a difference?

A study of the costs and benefits of Iowa EFNEP was published in December 2000. This study shows that for every \$1 spent to deliver nutrition education in Iowa, \$8.03 is saved in future health care costs. The \$8.03 in health care savings occur because participants

- learn safe food handling practices, thus having fewer foodborne illnesses;
- eat better during pregnancy, resulting in fewer low birthweight babies;
- are more likely to breastfeed their babies, resulting in fewer childhood diseases; and
- improve their overall diets, resulting in delay or prevention of chronic diseases.

When the adult participants entered the program, only 19 percent reported diets that contained foods from all five food groups. This percentage increased to 54 percent by the time participants graduated from the program. A positive change in at least one food group was noted in 94 percent of participants graduating from the program.

EFNEP participants also show behavior changes that translate into significant improvements in daily living skills. Results from a survey taken at the beginning and at the end of the program show that

- 86 percent of participants showed improvement in one or more nutrition practices (i.e., planning



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meals, making healthy food choices, preparing meals without adding salt, reading nutrition labels, or having children eat breakfast);

- 82 percent of participants showed improvement in one or more food resource management practices (i.e., planning meals, comparing prices, using grocery lists, or not running out of food);
- 64 percent of participants showed improvement in one or more food safety practices (i.e., thawing and storing foods properly); and
- 26 percent of youth participants sampled increased their nutrition knowledge.

When adults first enrolled in the program, only 4 percent followed the acceptable practices for all indicators. At the end of the program 32 percent had achieved the goal.

Who participates in EFNEP?

EFNEP targets both youth and low-resource adults with children under the age of 10. During the 2005 program year, 2,124 families, including 160 pregnant teens, participated in Iowa EFNEP. Of these, 1,236 (58 percent) graduated and 21 percent continue to participate in EFNEP.

Eighty-four percent of Iowa EFNEP families have incomes below 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines, and 57 percent have incomes below 50 percent poverty. Thirty-four percent of Iowa EFNEP participants are from minority families. A very high percentage of program participants receive other federal food assistance. Seventy-six percent of EFNEP families receive WIC benefits, and 59 percent receive Food Stamps. Only 6 percent were in EFNEP alone at the time

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of enrollment. Three hundred twenty-four families (15 percent) enrolled in one or more food assistance programs as a result of participating in EFNEP.

In addition, EFNEP reached 16,147 youth, primarily through school enrichment and summer day-camp programs. About 92 percent of these youth were between ages 6 and 12.

How is EFNEP delivered?

Families and youth are taught individually or in small groups by 35 Iowa EFNEP program assistants. These paraprofessional instructors are trained in basic nutrition and food-related topics by extension nutrition specialists from Iowa State University. Many EFNEP program assistants are hired from the community in which they work.

The work of volunteers is an important component of Iowa EFNEP. Volunteers assist in group teaching, making arrangements for meeting sites, compiling newsletters, and providing child care so that adult EFNEP participants can participate. During the 2005 program year, 1,138 individuals donated 6,732 hours to the program.

Where is EFNEP located?

EFNEP is located currently in eight counties in Iowa: Black Hawk, Clinton, Johnson, Linn, Polk, Scott, West Pottawattamie, and Woodbury.

It all adds up.

EFNEP is a people-oriented program. Iowa families enrolled in EFNEP receive guidance to reach better nutrition and greater self-sufficiency. For more than 35 years, EFNEP has helped develop strong, healthy, thriving families.

... and justice for all

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