

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Extension educators teach older Idahoans to live healthier lives

AT A GLANCE

A team of family and consumer sciences (FCS) Extension educators delivered a Nutrition for Healthy Aging program. Senior participants gained knowledge and projected positive behavior change.

The Situation

There is a growing need for nutrition education for an aging U.S. population. According to 2014 statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately one in seven people were 65 years or older. It is projected that in 2060, one in four people will be 65 years of age or older. This dramatic increase in the next 40 years is likely to have a significant impact on our healthcare system. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics estimates that 90 percent of older Americans have a chronic disease, like hypertension, diabetes and high cholesterol. Of the older Americans who have a chronic disease, 70 percent of physical decline are associated with modifiable risk factors, which includes nutrition.

Our Response

To disseminate the growing nutrition research, a one-time Nutrition for Healthy Aging program targeting adults over 50 years old was developed by University of Idaho Extension. The program highlights four key nutrition messages that can promote health and increase quality of life for adults 50 years and older:

- Eat more plant-based foods.
- Ensure adequate consumption of calcium and vitamin D.



FCS Extension educator, Bridget Morrisroe-Aman, teaching the Nutrition for Healthy Aging program at a library in Boise.

- Focus on the optimal amount of protein and distribute this throughout the day.
- Understand the symptoms of dehydration and drink at least 64 ounces of free water each day.

The program is developed for an hour and a half timeframe and includes three food and/or recipe samples.

A team of four University of Idaho Extension educators partnered to deliver the program across Idaho. To reach older Americans, our team partnered with community organizations, including church groups, recreation centers, senior centers and American Association for Retired Persons (AARP). These partnerships increased participant registration and attendance.

A written evaluation was distributed at the end of the program using a retrospective survey, which measured both knowledge and anticipated behavior change.

Program Outcomes

Since 2017, over 200 participants have been reached with 173 completed program evaluations. Over 95 percent of participants were 50 years of age or older.

Over 98 percent of participants enjoyed the program, rating it at least an eight out of a 10-point scale.

After participating in the program, over 98 percent of all participants “agreed” to all six of the knowledge-based statements. Two statements showed the greatest improvement with knowledge gain.

Ninety-six participants reported “disagree” or “not sure” to the statement “I know that I need to eat protein consistently to help maintain my muscle and function” before the program. After participating in the program, 95 out of the 96 participants (98.9 percent) reported “agree” to this statement.

Ninety-two participants retrospectively reported “disagree” or “not sure” to the statement “I know the signs and symptoms of dehydration” before participating in the program. Of these participants, 90 (97.8 percent) reported “agree” to this statement after participation.

Four self-anticipated behavior change statements were asked within the written survey. Over 92 percent of all participants reported “agree” to the statements listed below after participating in the program.

- I plan to eat more plant-based foods (a variety of fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, etc.).
- I plan to identify calcium and vitamin D fortified foods by reading nutrition labels and will drink/eat these fortified products to help maintain my bone health.
- I plan to make sure that I am eating at least 3 ounces of protein at each meal.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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55-19-jamende-healthy-aging • 12/19

- I plan to drink water consistently throughout the day, even when I am not thirsty.

Of the statements, two showed the greatest improvement with anticipated behavior. The greatest anticipated behavior change improvement is with the statement: “I plan to make sure that I am eating at least 3 ounces of protein at each meal.” Of the 167 total responses, 123 participants reported “disagree” or “not sure” to this statement before the program. Almost 95 percent (116) of those participants indicated “agree” to this statement after participating in the program.

For the statement, “I plan to identify calcium and vitamin D fortified foods by reading nutrition labels and will drink/eat these fortified products to help maintain my bone health,” 115 participants reported “disagree” or “not sure” before the program. After participating in the program, 107 (93 percent) of those participants improved by reporting “agree” to this statement.

Many participants described specific behavior changes they anticipate making because of program participation. Listed below are some reported statements:

- Drink more water and have three-fourths of my plate be from plants.
- Will distribute my protein better throughout the day.
- Trying to be creative in adding more fruits and vegetables.
- I will be more mindful with a balanced plate.

Because of this program, the senior participants were able to gain nutrition knowledge and project behavioral changes that they anticipate making to improve their overall health.

The Future

Only 11.3 percent of current participants identified as a minority racial and/or ethnic group. Extension educators will seek out new opportunities to reach a more diverse audience.