

Creating Healthy Behaviors Among Utah's SNAP-Ed Participants

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Introduction

Utah's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed), Food \$ense, developed the innovative *CREATE* curriculum which teaches low-income Utahns how to eat according to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The *CREATE* curriculum aims to give participants the knowledge, confidence, and cooking skills necessary to create a variety of nutritious meals from common ingredients. It is well established that low-income Americans are at an increased risk of several chronic diseases^{1,2}. It is paramount that nutrition education curricula are available to improve this population's ability to make food and physical activity choices that support a healthy lifestyle^{3,4}. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the *CREATE* curriculum on participants' intention to change and their actual behavior change in regards to a variety of nutrition-related behaviors.

Methods

The SNAP-Ed *CREATE* Curriculum was evaluated through three participant surveys. After receiving a SNAP-Ed lesson, participants were asked to complete the class participant survey. This survey included retrospective pre-post questions related to their nutrition behaviors before and intention to change those behaviors after receiving SNAP-Ed nutrition education. Participants were also asked to complete a six-month follow-up survey. This survey included 20 retrospective pre-post nutrition-related behavior change questions. In addition, three questions allowed participants to share personal stories and experiences through qualitative responses. All participants received a punch card to track the number of SNAP-Ed classes they attended over the study period. Participants were provided a link to take the follow up survey online after attending six SNAP-Ed classes. This survey included 20 questions about a wide variety of nutrition and physical activity-related behaviors. Retrospective pre-post questions were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test. Qualitative data was organized into codes and themes were developed.

Results

Participants were surveyed up to three points in time; after participating in one SNAP-Ed class (n=6,825), after receiving at least six SNAP-Ed classes (n=168), and six-months after receiving at least one SNAP-Ed class (n=249).

Results (cont'd)

The majority of participants were non-Hispanic, white females ranging from 18 to 60 years of age and either receiving or eligible to receive nutrition assistance benefits. Participants reported an intention to improve all nutrition-related behaviors in pre-post surveys after participating in a SNAP-Ed class (P<0.001). Participants also reported actually changing these behaviors six-months later (P<0.001). After receiving six SNAP-Ed classes, participants reported consuming more whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and less saturated fats and processed food.

The majority of participants who completed the six-month follow-up survey discussed how their families have been consuming an overall healthy and well-balanced diet since attending SNAP-Ed classes. Many reported that they have the knowledge base and resources to continue living a healthier lifestyle. Participants feel that they are able to incorporate healthier ingredients into their meals, including items that they would have never used prior to SNAP-Ed classes.

Figure 1. Changes In Nutrition Behaviors After SNAP-Ed Classes

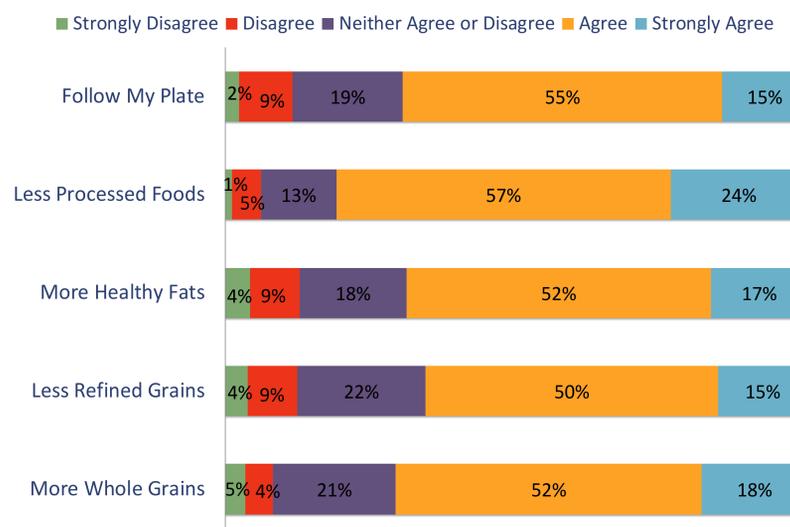


Table 1. Intent to Change and Self-Reported Nutrition-Related Behavior Change in Adult SNAP-Ed Participants in Utah

Questions*	Intent to Change			Self-Reported		
	Retrospective Pretest Median (IQR)	Retrospective Posttest Median (IQR)	P-value	Retrospective Pretest Median (IQR)	Retrospective Posttest Median (IQR)	P-value
Stretch food \$	4 (3, 5)	4 (4, 5)	<.001	4 (2, 5)	4 (4, 5)	<.001
Shop with a list	4 (3, 5)	4 (4, 5)	<.001	4 (3, 4)	4 (4, 5)	<.001
Prepare meals at home ≥ 3x/wk	4 (3, 5)	5 (4, 5)	<.001	5 (4, 5)	5 (4, 5)	<.001
Eat meals as family ≥ 3x/wk	4 (3, 5)	5 (4, 5)	<.001	4 (3, 5)	5 (4, 5)	<.001
Physically active for 30 minutes 5d/wk	4 (3, 5)	4 (3, 5)	<.001	3 (2, 4)	4 (3, 5)	<.001

Table 2. Qualitative Data of SNAP-Ed Participants from the 6 Month Follow-Up Survey

Questions	Participant Responses
How did Food \$ense change family diet?	<p>"Food \$ense lessons have increased my awareness of other whole grains my family can add to our food storage, prepare, and eat."</p> <p>"We are sitting down as a family more to eat healthier meals and snacks."</p>
Stories about knowledge gained	<p>"I have a neighbor that I was able to share the information with. We make our shopping list together now. We can trade recipes and [we cook with] most of the foods we are growing in our garden. Food \$ense has helped us broaden our horizons."</p> <p>"I love shopping with a menu now. It saves so much money for my family. There are times I am asked how I keep our grocery budget so low and I always tell them about the benefits of making a menu before you shop and then sticking to your shopping list."</p>
Stories about lessons	<p>"I really enjoy going to the classes. My boys that go too have been more willing to try new and different foods because they tried it at the class."</p> <p>"I come with a friend of mine who has challenges, she loves the lessons, [company, and delicious food]. Because you make her day, you make my day too."</p>

Conclusions

These results suggest the *CREATE* curriculum is an effective tool for changing a variety of nutrition-related behaviors of its class participants that result in an overall healthier lifestyle. The innovative approach of the *CREATE* lessons to teach participants basic cooking techniques that can be used with any ingredients they have on hand, rather than a single recipe, may attribute to its effectiveness in creating sustained, healthy eating patterns. Further research should be conducted that specifically evaluates the impact of the cooking skills gained in the *CREATE* classes on participants' ability to make and sustain the dietary improvements found in this study.

References

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