Development and Implementation of the G.E.T.T. Cooking Curriculum: A Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT

Contributing factors to the obesity epidemic in the US are great and complex but a leading factor is dietary behavior. Hectic schedules and increasing availability of highly processed foods, even in food desert areas, provide an appealing opportunity to feed a family quickly and at a cost-efficient manner. In an effort to combat the appealing nature of fast food consumption, it is essential to arm adults and adolescents with the tools, skills, and knowledge necessary to provide themselves and their families with healthy home-prepared meals. The purpose of this pilot study was to test the 8-lesson curriculum, Generations Eating Together Through Cooking (G.E.T.T. Cooking), and determine its efficacy in a low-income audience. Pre, post, and follow-up surveys were administered. Cooking self-efficacy, dietary behaviors, family meal frequency, food safety, access to food, and child participation in meal preparation were assessed. A 24-hour dietary recall was used to further understand dietary quality. Interviews were conducted with the families after the last lesson and at the follow-up review.

INTRODUCTION

The obesity epidemic, in the US and worldwide, has reached unimaginable heights. The contributing factors are great and complex but a leading factor is dietary behavior. In the US, over one-third of the adult population is obese while over one-third of the child and adolescent population is either overweight or obese. Hectic schedules and the increasing availability of highly processed foods, even in food desert areas, provide an appealing opportunity to feed a family quickly and at a cost-efficient manner. Numerous studies have demonstrated that frequent fast-food consumption contributes to significant weight gain. Between the years of 2007 and 2010, Americans consumed an average of 11.3% of their total daily caloric intake from fast-food eateries. In an effort to combat the appealing nature of fast-food consumption, it is essential to arm adults and adolescents with the tools, skills, and knowledge necessary to provide themselves and their families with healthy home-prepared meals. The purpose of this study was to test the efficacy of the Generations Eating Together Through Cooking (G.E.T.T.) Cooking curriculum with a low-income population at the Dream Center located in Erasley, SC.

METHODS

A convenience sample of 2 families were obtained at the Dream Center located in Erasley, SC. The families included a total of 2 adults and 3 children, aged 9 and older. Eight cooking lessons were conducted, each starting with a 30-minute lesson and discussion of concepts, followed by a 1-hour cooking class, and concluding with a “family-style” meal. A pre, post, and follow-up survey were administered. Cooking self-efficacy, dietary behaviors, family meal frequency, food safety, access to food, and child participation in meal preparation were assessed. A 24-hour dietary recall was used to further understand dietary quality. Interviews were conducted with the families after the last lesson and at the follow-up review.

RESULTS

Adult participants demonstrated a decrease in sugar-sweetened beverages, distractions during meals, food pickiness, food waste, and fast food consumption. They also demonstrated an increase in food budgeting, food security, food safety practices, nutrition label reading, breakfast consumption, consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, child involvement, and in-home meal consumption. Child participants demonstrated a decrease in sugar-sweetened beverages and sugary snacks. They also demonstrated an increase in cooking self-efficacy, fruit consumption, and involvement in meal preparation activities. An adult participant discussed the impact the lessons had on her eating habits and the eating habits of her grandchildren stating: “I now read labels before I by anything. I also don’t give my grandkids snacks like chips and cake just to get them to eat.” Comments about dietary habits included: “I feel I can cook better food and get my grandkids to eat them!”. The children participants also expressed their content with the lessons stating: “I learned a lot of how to make different things! When I go home I try to help my mom more!” said a 9-year-old female participant. “I can’t wait to come back and see what food we are going to make!” stated 10-year-old participant.

Results were sustained at the follow-up review which was conducted 6 months after the last lesson. One adult participant self-reported a 20-lb weight loss and all participants reported continued increase in cooking self-efficacy, increased family meal frequency, and family participation in meal preparation activities.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study are promising, demonstrating that the curriculum was able to enact positive changes in outcome measures such as cooking self-efficacy and fruit and vegetable consumption, while decreasing negative behaviors such as consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages. The hands-on cooking part of the lesson demonstrated to be very valuable, providing opportunities for direct involvement of the participants. Involving both the children and adults in the cooking, while demonstrating how to delegate responsibilities, demonstrated to be a key component to the success of the curriculum.