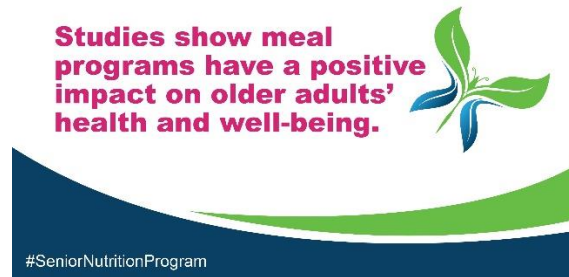


Healthy Eating Study Validates Program Effectiveness

By Stephen Anable, March 2021



Our Healthy Eating for Successful Living in Older Adults program has been a mainstay of our nutrition services for years. Now, in an effort to officially designate the workshop as Evidence-Based, we have participated in a national study to gauge its effectiveness. Healthy Eating encourages people to improve their diets in a systematic but customized way through group instruction, peer support, and goal setting. It uses a scripted curriculum based on suggestions from the MyPlate.gov nutrition guidelines from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Funded by the AARP Foundation, the study, which began in late 2018, involved 306 participants in 40 states around the country. The Healthy Living Center of Excellence partnered with researchers from Tufts University to evaluate our statistics. Half of the individuals completed the course, while half functioned as a control group. Those taking the course attended six weeks of classes, which met two-and-one-half hours per week.

As always, the Healthy Eating program stressed the importance of self-management and the role nutrition plays in reducing chronic disease in older adults. Participants learned skills such as goal setting, problem-solving, self-assessment, and how to track dietary patterns. They were encouraged to eat one to two cups of fruit per day and taught to vary their vegetable intake between dark green vegetables; red and orange vegetables; beans, peas, and lentils; starchy vegetables; and others. They were asked to consume whole grains, vary their protein, eat at least eight ounces of cooked fish each week, and choose low-fat or fat-free dairy products.

Our groups in the study taking Healthy Eating ranged in size from 10 to 16 people. At the end of every session, each person set a goal, a nutrition challenge, to achieve by the subsequent session. The control groups of course skipped the workshop and, instead, met three times, at the study's beginning, week eight, and six months after the start. All groups completed the same paperwork and provided body measurements at identical intervals.

All the sites have now completed the study, nationwide. The Healthy Living Center of Excellence is waiting for final results from the researchers, but preliminary findings show that nearly every healthy behavior measured—increased intake of healthy foods, increased label reading, increase in consuming bone-beneficial items, and more—resulted in statistically significant

improvement which were sustained at six months post intervention. Healthy Eating participants in the study also experienced a statistically significant decrease in the “waist to hip ratio,” a key measurement in determining the likelihood of chronic disease.

“All of these positives outcomes demonstrate the efficacy of the Healthy Eating program in helping older adults develop and maintain healthy nutrition habits,” says Kara Lakin, Project Manager, Nutrition Services, Healthy Living Center of Excellence. “We are thrilled with the results so far.”

For more information about Healthy Eating for Successful Living in Older Adults, please visit: www.healthyliving4me.org