

FOCUS

ON

Healthy Living



OKLAHOMA COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION SERVICE

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service • Oklahoma State University
Summer 1997

Health care costs, the link between diet and disease, and the possibility of living longer, healthier lives has brought more public attention to the way we eat and the amount of physical activity in our lives. Restaurants are now adding menu items advertised as low fat or healthy. Food labels vie for our attention in claiming reduced fat, low fat, and no fat. The growing public awareness of the association between the way we eat and our health has increased public interest in learning how to eat healthy.

In response to the need for education on healthy eating, the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service has developed an eight week nutrition education program. This program, titled *Healthy Living*, guides participating Oklahomans toward their goal of eating a healthier diet. Not only are participants enjoying healthier diets, they are also experiencing better health. In seventeen counties where the program has been conducted, over three-fourths of the participants experienced a significant decrease in cholesterol.

The following articles provide more in-depth information about this practical program that is making a real difference in the health of Oklahoma citizens, and potentially reducing their long term health care costs.

Your questions and suggestions for improving the quality of life for Oklahomans through family and consumer education programs are always welcome.

– Lynda Harriman

Associate Dean/Assistant Director,
Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

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Reducing Health Care Costs



The Challenge of Living Healthy

Oklahoma has the second highest death rate due to coronary heart disease in the nation and the thirteenth highest death rate in the nation due to stroke. With five of the leading disease causes of death being associated with diet it is no wonder that Oklahomans' concern about the role of diet and nutrition with health has reached an all time high. Many Oklahomans find it difficult to understand and implement the array of health information they receive because of the serious gap between experts' research findings and consumers' understanding of what truly constitutes a healthy lifestyle. Consumers are confused about nutrition and health information, which results in an inability to distinguish between valid, misleading, or fraudulent recommendations. In addition, consumers receive nutrition and health information in isolated pieces, without a basis for understanding how these pieces fit together to achieve overall wellness.

The ability of consumers to improve their personal health depends upon how successfully they can translate science-based information into appropriate behaviors which lead to an improved health status. Today's challenge is to find more encouraging ways for consumers to adopt healthier lifestyles, to improve their health, and consequently drive down health care costs.

State of the art consumer education utilizes nutrition and health promotion,

which in turn translates science-based information into appropriate health behavior recommendations. Consumers want directions. They want to know what to do and how to do it. Consumers don't "reduce fat content," they bake instead of fry. Consumers don't "exercise," they walk or play racquetball. Consumers don't want to "count calories," but they can learn to recognize a one-half cup vegetable serving or a three ounce meat serving. These concepts strongly suggest that food, nutrition, and health and wellness recommendations need to be translated into clear, easy, and meaningful consumer-based messages and specific behaviors which they can implement.

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service's Response

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service is currently conducting a five year impact program entitled *Healthy Living*. The first year *Healthy Living* curriculum is an eight week education program that educates Oklahomans on applying the Dietary Guidelines and Food Guide Pyramid recommendations to food selection, preparation and safety.

The second year *Active Living* curriculum is an eight week educational program that teaches Oklahomans how to increase physical activity. The *Active Living* curriculum consists of eight sessions on physical fitness, aerobic endurance, muscle strength and endurance, flexibility, weight management, fitness safety, finding time, and sticking with fitness.

Impact

Important improvements in health and wellness measures were observed from the first year *Healthy Living* impact evaluation. The improvements include a:

- significant improvement in food selection and preparation practices
- significant increase in the number of daily servings from the bread, cereal, rice, and pasta group
- significant decrease in the number of daily servings from fats and sweets

- significant decrease in body mass index (a measure of obesity)
- significant decrease in diastolic blood pressure
- significant decrease in fasting blood glucose
- significant decrease in total cholesterol

The observations all represent improvements in health status and contribute to a decreased risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and certain types of cancer. The significant reduction in total cholesterol specifically represents a decreased risk of cardiovascular disease. The American Heart Association and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (1990) reported that a 1 percent decrease in cholesterol translates into a 3 percent decrease in coronary heart disease risk. The decrease in blood cholesterol among *Healthy Living Program* participants represents a 16.5 percent decreased risk of coronary heart disease. The American Heart Association and the National Health Lung and Blood Institute estimate the five-year medical costs of coronary heart disease at \$51,000. Using the prevalence

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Lynda Harriman

Lynda Harriman, Associate Dean/Assistant Director

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rate of coronary heart disease from the Surgeon General's Report on Nutrition and Health (1988), the 16.5 percent decrease in coronary heart disease risk for the five year *Healthy Living* impact program represents a savings of \$255,000. If this program were expanded across the whole state, the potential cost savings from the five year *Healthy Living Program* is \$11.5 million.

Contact:

Janice R Hermann, Ph.D., R.D./L.D.
Nutrition Education Specialist
315 HES
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078
405-744-6824
jrher@okway.okstate.edu

Barbara J Brown, Ph.D., R.D./L.D.
Food Specialist
315 HES
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078
405-744-6824
bbrown@okway.okstate.edu

1996 Healthy Living County Highlights

Carol Wood, *Washington County*, presented the *Healthy Living* program in cooperation with the YWCA. The participant comments indicate that the program was well received. A food service director at a retirement home, said she "took back the information she learned at the *Healthy Living* program and used it to modify the foods she served." She now offers a lower

Another reported her doctor said, "I don't know what you're doing, but keep it up. Your blood glucose, blood cholesterol and blood pressure are the lowest they've been in years."

fat option at each meal. Another participant stated that the "*Healthy Living* program was the first program she had attended that pulled the nutrition, food selection and preparation, and fitness information together." She also said that three months after she attended the *Healthy Living* program and started using the information she had learned, her diabetic husband lowered his fasting glucose by 75 mg/dL and lost 15 pounds.

This year Carol is teaching *Healthy Living* in cooperation with the 55+ Center, and is working with the director of the Elderly Nutrition Program to write a grant to provide *Healthy Living* to nutrition site members next year.

Greer County's Nadine Bailey had a unique opportunity to offer the *Healthy Living* program in Jackson County at the Altus Air Force Base Fitness Center in

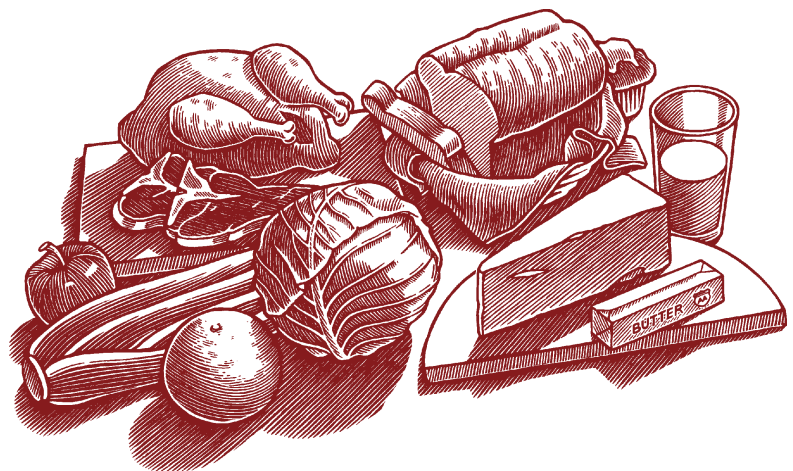
cooperation with Major Regina Watson. Nadine had already offered the *Healthy Living* program three times at the Altus Air Force Base, and is planning a fourth series. Nadine has had excellent feedback. One participant brought her nine year old son because "he didn't want to miss the class." The same woman said that *Healthy Living* "was very beneficial, not only to me but my five children and husband as well, and even friends who I shared the information with. In fact I'm going to send my two older daughters next time."

In *Woodward County*, Home Economist Recia Garcia worked with the community pantry to provide scholarships for low income participants to attend her *Healthy Living* program series. Recia also worked cooperatively with the Woodward Hospital and Health Center to provide pre and post blood work for participants. Offering both morning and evening sessions of the *Healthy Living* program helped Recia to reach new audiences. She also offered an optional 30 minute fitness program following each *Healthy Living* program session.

Susan Pearson of *Seminole County* has held two courses of *Healthy Living* and

one on *Active Living*. Susan received excellent responses to these programs. One class member reported her blood cholesterol dropped 80 mg/dL. Another reported her doctor said, "I don't know what you're doing, but keep it up. Your blood glucose, blood cholesterol and blood pressure are the lowest they've been in years." Susan is now conducting a spin off of these programs with the Seminole Nation Wellness Center. Susan is also working cooperatively with the Maud School system where she will do a kick off and train the teachers. The teachers will then lead the *Healthy Living* for students in grades 9 through 12.

In *LeFlore County*, Patty Wright offered the *Healthy Living* program as an evening continuing education class at Carl Albert State College. This allowed her to reach a new audience. Two months after the program one student sought Patty to tell her "using the information she had learned at the class in modifying her food selection and preparation at home she had lost 12 pounds." She said she wasn't actively trying to lose weight, but was just trying to follow healthy food selection and preparation practices.



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