Cooking Matters

Share Our Strength

Overview

Cooking Matters is a direct education program that offers courses to help families and caregivers shop and eat healthier. As part of the No Kid Hungry campaign to end childhood hunger in America, Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters teaches participants to shop smarter, use nutrition information to make healthier choices and cook delicious, affordable meals. Cooking Matters provides professional-level curricula and instructional materials, training, evaluation and national leadership support, while local program partners provide hands-on, grassroots-level resources, program customizations and relationships that are best addressed on the local level. Cooking Matters has empowered families with the skills to stretch their food budgets while cooking healthy meals. Target Behavior: Healthy Eating, Food Insecurity/Food Assistance Intervention Type: Direct Education

Intervention Reach and Adoption

Cooking Matters targets moms, dads, grandparents, caregivers, kids, and teens at their home or school environment. The courses are composed by experts in their field that range from experience chefs to public health professionals. The courses can be utilized individually or as part of a family unit. For the last 20 years, Cooking Matters and thousands of volunteer instructors have conducted more than 17,600 courses and 4,900 tours, helping more than 172,000 low-income individuals in communities across the country learn how to eat better for less. Setting: Childcare, Community, Retail, School Target Audience: All Race/Ethnicity: All

Intervention Components

Community partners that serve low-income families offer six-week Cooking Matters courses to adults, kids and families. Each course is team-taught by a volunteer chef and nutrition educator. Lessons cover meal preparation, grocery shopping, food budgeting and nutrition. Participants practice fundamental food skills, including proper knife techniques, reading ingredient labels, cutting up a whole chicken, and making a healthy meal for a family of four on a $10 budget. Adults and teens take home a bag of groceries after each class so they can practice the recipes taught that day.
Intervention Materials

Cooking Matters and their partners serve families across the country through:

- **Cooking Matters for Adults** teaches low-income adults (primarily adults with children) how to prepare and shop sensibly for healthy meals on a limited budget. The program is often paired with Cooking Matters EXTRA for Parents of Preschoolers, an addendum focused specifically on adults with preschool-age children. Cooking Matters for Adults and Cooking Matters EXTRA for Parents of Preschoolers are available in both English and Spanish.

- **Cooking Matters for Families** teaches school-age children (ages 8 to 12) and their parents about healthy eating as a family and the importance of working together to plan and prepare healthy meals on a budget.

- **Cooking Matters for Kids** engages kids ages 8 to 12 in learning about healthy eating and provides simple nutritious recipes that children can prepare themselves.

- **Cooking Matters for Teens** teaches teens how to make healthy food choices, meals and snacks for themselves, their families and friends.

- **Cooking Matters for Child Care Professionals** teaches child care professionals about healthy meal preparation and creating a healthy food environment for the kids in their care.

Evidence Summary

The first-ever long-term evaluation of Cooking Matters was conducted by Altarum Institute, an independent health systems research organization from April 2014 to March 2015. The 1,600+ study participants included families taking a Cooking Matters course and a comparison group of families who did not take the course. They were surveyed before the course began, and three and six months after it finished. After Cooking Matters, families are…

- More confident in their cooking abilities (10% increase).
- See fewer barriers to making healthy, affordable meals (11% decrease).
- Cooking meals more often, and making meals healthier and more budget-friendly.
- In the short-term (3 months), families are eating more fruit. Over the long-term (6 months), they are eating more vegetables, including non-fried options and green salad.
- Before the course, families “sometimes” worried that food might run out each month; six months later, they “rarely” worried about this.
- Families were 17% more confident in stretching their food dollars (including federal benefits like SNAP and WIC) due to the strategies they learned in Cooking Matters, like planning meals, shopping with a list and comparing unit prices.

Classification: Evidence-based

Evaluation Indicators

Based on the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework, the following outcome indicators can be used to evaluate intervention progress and success:

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<th>Readiness and Capacity – Short Term (ST)</th>
<th>Changes – Medium Term (MT)</th>
<th>Effectiveness and Maintenance – Long Term (LT)</th>
<th>Population Results (R)</th>
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### Evaluation Materials

Currently, no evaluation tools or materials are available.

### Additional Information

**Website:** The Cooking Matters website ([http://cookingmatters.org/](http://cookingmatters.org/)) includes recipes with full nutrition information and links to print and share on social media, videos and tips on saving money at the store, turning kid favorites into healthy meals and holidays on a budget, stories from graduates and volunteers, and information on how to get involved and lead a tour in your community. **Contact Person(s):** Cooking Matters 1030 15th St NW, Suite 1100W Washington, DC 20005 Phone: 800.969.4767 Email: cookingmatters@strength.org