Increasing Children’s Exposure to and Preferences for Fruits and Vegetables at Summer Food Service Program Sites

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Background

- Fruits and vegetables (FVs) are associated with a lower risk of numerous chronic health conditions including hypertension, coronary heart disease, stroke, and numerous types of cancers (1,2).
- Children in the United States are not consuming the recommended amounts of FVs (3).
- The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a federal nutrition program that provides free, nutritious meals and snacks to children ages 18 and younger in low-income areas during the summer.
- The USDA recommends that SFSP sites use fun and interesting nutrition education activities to get children excited about trying new, healthy items on the menu (4).
- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education (SNAP-Ed) is a nutrition education and obesity prevention program that targets low-income individuals.
- USDA recommends that federal nutrition programs, such as SNAP-Ed and SFSP, coordinate and collaborate in providing nutrition education and obesity prevention services (5).

Objective

- To pilot an intervention to increase children’s exposure to and preferences for FVs at SFSP sites.

Intervention Description

- An eight-session series of fun, interactive nutrition education activities was provided at two SFSP sites in Chapel Hill, North Carolina by the Child Nutrition Project of UNC SNAP-Ed and No Kid Hungry North Carolina.
- Through a partnership with Chartwells School Dining Services for the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools SFSP, special FVs (e.g. sugar snap peas, colored cauliflower) were served in addition to the regular lunch menu during six of the sessions.
- Nutrition education activities took place immediately prior to lunch and were designed to get children excited about eating FVs and tasting the featured items.
- Over 125 children attended at least one session.
- Participants were between the ages of 5 and 11 years old.

Evaluation

- Pre- and post-surveys were administered measuring exposure to and preferences for the featured FVs.
- Rating forms were completed after each featured item was served.

Results

Table 1: Percent of Children Who Liked Fruits or Vegetables They Tasted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruit or Vegetable</th>
<th>Number of Children Tasting</th>
<th>Percent of Children Who “Like a lot” or “Like a Little”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pineapple</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantaloupe</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honeydew</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grape Tomatoes</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar Snap Peas*</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colored Cauliflower</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Due to logistical challenges, sugar snap peas were only offered at one site.

Conclusions and Implications

- Children tried and liked the FVs offered through this intervention.
- Combining nutrition education with the introduction of FVs at SFSP sites may be a way to encourage children to try new FVs, and increase their preferences for them.
- Partnerships between SNAP-Ed and SFSP can be a successful strategy for implementing nutrition education programming at SFSP sites and encouraging children to try new, healthy items being served.

References


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The featured fruit and vegetables were served through the SFSP and provided by Chartwells School Dining Services for the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools.