

Out of the Box Uses for Vegetables: Reframing the Old to Draw Interest and Improve Health

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SITUATION

In Polk County less than one out of five adults consume the recommended three or more servings of vegetables per day. In addition, the top four causes of death are lifestyle-related chronic diseases, and 69.6% are overweight or obese (1), which is higher than the state average. Increasing vegetables, which have fiber and nutrients, can help prevent diseases and manage weight; however, getting people interested in improving their nutrition can be challenging.

OBJECTIVES

- 1) Increase participant knowledge about new ways to use and prepare vegetables
- 2) Increase the amount and variety of vegetables participants consume
- 3) Reduce the amount of vegetables participants throw away.

METHODS

A class titled “Out of the Box Uses for Vegetables” was created targeting adults in Polk County to put a different spin on eating vegetables. The class taught people recommended servings per day, health benefits of vegetables, cooking methods that work for most vegetables, and how to save money and reduce food waste by making simple and fun additions or substitutions to foods using vegetables. Food demonstrations were done to showcase a unique use of vegetables. Social cognitive theory constructs of self-efficacy, behavioral capability, and outcome expectations were used to design the program and increase likelihood of behavior change. The class, which was taught at an intermediate level, used integrative methods, including brainstorming and group discussions. A nine-question, retrospective pre-post survey used multiple choice likelihood Likert scales to evaluate knowledge gain and intent to change behavior.



RESULTS

Three 60-90-minute classes were held in 2018 and were attended by 40 unique people. As a result of the class, 94% of participants (n=34) said they have new ideas for using vegetables, 97% (n=39) were extremely or somewhat likely to increase the amount of vegetables they eat, 97% (n=39) were extremely or somewhat likely to increase the variety, and 83% (n=33) were less likely to throw away vegetables.



Cauliflower Ceviche in process!



Cauliflower Potato Salad

CONCLUSIONS

This class shows tremendous promise in helping people eat more vegetables and over time lead to improved health and lower health care costs, as the benefits of improved nutrition are well known in helping to prevent and manage disease. It also can help reduce food waste, creating a more sustainable food system with less impact on our environment, which could be measured in future classes by asking participants to estimate the amount of vegetables thrown away and then following up in 3-6 months to see if the amount was reduced. Money savings is another potential outcome that could be measured. This class has drawn interest because of its uniqueness and has potential to reach the county’s culturally and geographically diverse residents.



Preparing the Carrot Dogs

