

# Adapting Nutrition Education in a Food Pantry Setting

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## Background

- Those who visit food pantries report eating less vegetables and fruit than those who do not rely on food pantries (Robaina & Martin, 2013)
- The food insecure are more likely to have a lower diet quality and consume inexpensive foods which are often calorically dense and nutritionally poor (Seligman et al., 2007).
- Nutritional interventions aimed at improving diet quality are recommended for food insecure populations (Mello et al., 2010)

## Aim

The purpose of this study was to understand perceived benefits and barriers to attendance at NY Common Pantry nutrition education programs and whether those programs resulted in changes in behavior for the individual and/or their family. Qualitative and quantitative data was examined separately for alignment.

## Program Description

The SNAP-Ed NY Live Healthy! Program at NY Common Pantry offers direct nutrition education programming and cooking demonstrations for underserved, high-need community members, with a focus on the SNAP-eligible population.

The six one-hour workshops are part of the *Cooking Matters in Your Community* curriculum, and are based on the *Social Cognitive Theory*, which considers the social environment and focuses on self-efficacy. The series includes:



- Introduction to MyPlate, Fruits and Vegetables
- Whole Grains and Fiber
- Protein and Dairy
- Nutrients of Concern
- Introduction to Label Reading and Menu Planning
- Apply Your Knowledge! Healthy Alternatives to Fast Food

## Methods

A mixed methods analysis was conducted.

- Seven focus groups (n=56) were moderated in Chinese, Spanish and English.
- Data collected from the prior years using pre- and post-program USDA-adapted surveys were also examined, (n=181).

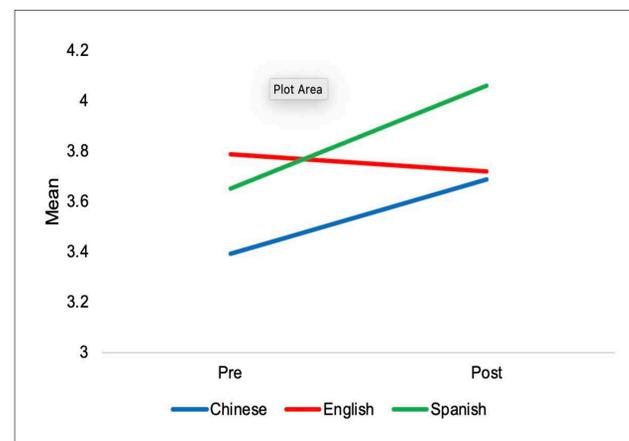
A thematic analysis approach was used with the focus group data while the survey data were analyzed using a repeated measures analysis of variances.

## Results

Focus groups participants reported **few barriers** to attendance though most preferred to **combine a pantry visit with class attendance**. While **all groups reported a preference to attend nutrition education programming with friends**; only the Chinese groups made a point of coming with their friends. Participants in all groups reported an increased consumption in the **amount and variety of fruits and vegetables** and an increased **use of food labels** when they shopped.

**An analysis of the survey data revealed similar findings.** Participants made significant changes ( $p < .01$ ) in five areas: they increased the number of servings of fruit and vegetables, the variety of fruit and vegetables, as well as how often they read food labels to see if a beverage has sugar.

There was a significant effect between the different ethnic groups  $F(2,166) = 3.24, p < .05$ . Chinese and Spanish participants increased their variety of fruits, while the English participants did not.



## Conclusions

- There were distinct differences and preferences among the ethnic groups which should be considered when designing nutrition education programs.
- A nutrition education program, when adapted for language and culture, can assist different ethnic groups in building their capacity in health literacy and making positive health behavior changes.
- Cooking classes were important in creating familiarity with new fruits and vegetables as well as expanding cooking skills. Exposure to new fruits and vegetables were more likely to be adopted into diets when supported by cooking classes.
- There is an opportunity to improve food insecure diets through cultural adapted nutrition education programming that includes cooking demonstrations.



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