

Get a Taste for Nutrition with our Fruit & Vegetables Prescription –

The lack of economic access to healthy foods such as fresh produce, leads to socioeconomic inequalities in diet quality and increase chronic disease such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease & obesity. Consuming a diet high in vegetables and fruit can lead to a healthy lifestyle.

In an effort to reduce the high rates of food insecurity and diet-related disease while utilizing our region’s agricultural resources, we piloted a research-based, Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program (FVRx) in the underserved community of Brentwood in 2022. Each week for 4 weeks, our SNAP-Ed Nutritionists presented workshops at the Sun River Health Center, Brentwood Library and Thera Farms. Participants completing the program were eligible to receive up to \$60 in vouchers. Nearly 250 vouchers were redeemed for fresh produce.

In 2023, we were awarded a 1-year GUSNIP FVRx grant to implement a full scale 12 week, FVRx program. As a result of our experiences from our 2022 pilot, we held a kickoff event at the Brentwood Sun River location in March with Gala Foods of Brentwood as a new added partner. We invited health center providers, administrators, coordinators, and local legislators. Our first cohort consisted of nearly 50 enrolled participants with diabetes, pre-diabetes or risk factors associated with diabetes and an A1C of 8.0 or greater. A normal A1C is below 5.7. The goal of the program was to improve the A1C of the participants while increasing the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Workshops were presented in English & Spanish. Upon completion of each nutrition workshop, participants received a \$20 voucher, reinforcement items and diabetes friendly recipes. The partnership with Gala Foods proved to be very convenient; after participants finished the nutrition workshops at the health center, they walked across the parking lot to buy their produce at Gala. Our team of RDs presented Carb



Quotes from participants:

“I hope you can continue with this program next year. We learned so much from you.”

“I’ve learned to better manage my diabetes with your help and encouragement.”

“This program has been a gift of life.”

Counting Made Easy, Dining with Diabetes and Q&A workshops for enrolled patients which added another layer of diabetes specific education. An interactive grocery store tour at Gala Foods proved to be a very valuable workshop for the participants.

In June, a graduation was held with nearly 40 diabetes patients completing our first 12-week series. Patients raved about how much they learned by participating in this very engaging program. We have now launched 4 new cohort groups for high need communities in Riverhead, Wyandanch, Brentwood & Thera Farms. Our ultimate goal is to increase vegetable and fruit consumption with clinical improvement in A1C parameters.

Challenges: Suffolk County families struggle to meet the recommended intake of fruits & vegetables to reduce the risk for diet-related chronic diseases. The communities we work with have a large multi-ethnic population that struggle with food access, economic inequalities and increased cost of health care. To meet the requests of the patients, we offered virtual options in English/Spanish. \$20 vouchers for fruits and vegetables were mailed out to patients completing each workshop. We found the need for additional conference rooms, as well as additional bilingual educators to meet

the needs of the large Hispanic population many of whom were unable to read or write.

Accomplishments & Impacts: During our workshops participants learned how to prepare fresh produce, as well as other skills, leading to healthy habits that could be included in their own cultural recipes. This program reinforces the idea of buying local, seasonal foods and is sure to positively impact their food choices and health for a lifetime. We have presented our program at PA NEN conference and at Columbia University, NYC.

Sustainability Strategies: Our SNAP-ED bilingual nutritionists and diabetes educators continue to support and provide outreach with in person & virtual workshops that provide knowledge and skills to incorporate a variety of healthy food options that promote better health outcomes.

Our team of educators meet weekly to discuss successes, challenges faced and participant feedback to improve our program outcomes and work toward a sustainability plan for our 1-year extension. Newsday covered our kickoff event, which between the press coverage and presentations has led to great conversations for partnerships and expansions.

Story Type: PSE Change

Evaluation Framework Indicators: MT1, MT2, MT3, MT4, LT7, LT9



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USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. This material was funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program -- SNAP. SNAP provides nutrition assistance to people with low income. It can help you buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out how to check your eligibility for a range of benefits and apply for SNAP, go to myBenefits.ny.gov or call 1-800-342-3009 for more information.

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