

IMPACT

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Extension

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Eat smart and move more to reduce the risk of chronic disease

The Situation

As we age, the body naturally loses muscle mass, causing weakness that can impair the ability to perform activities of daily living, such as cleaning the house, cooking or bathing. Seven out of 10 Americans die each year from chronic illnesses such as heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes. These “lifestyle” diseases are among the most prevalent, costly and preventable of all health problems and are usually extensions of what people do, or do not do, as they go about daily living. An active lifestyle is key for older adults. Exercise also helps stimulate appetite and improves mood.

Our Response

In response to requests from local assisted housing and home care agencies, the Extension Nutrition Advisor and Family & Consumer Sciences Extension Educator worked with a planning committee of aging-related social and health agencies to design and implement a wellness education program for seniors. EAT SMART/MOVE MORE is an annual series of four 2-hour seminars on nutrition and exercise. Between February 2011 and November 2012, speakers from dance and yoga studios, Aging Adult Protection Social Services, Public Health District, Small Business Development Center, police and fire departments, Department of Insurance, Home Health & Hospice and Lewis Clark State College provided presentations on heart and bone health, lowering cancer risk, holiday season safety, oral health care, transitioning home from the hospital, Medicare, exercises for strength, balance and flexibility, reading food labels, and emotional health. Advisory committee members formatted the seminars and marketed them through their existing networks.



Participants practice Tai Chi movements that promote better balance and relaxation. Photo by Kathee Tiff.

Program Outcomes

Stanford University has developed a chronic disease self-management program to build the confidence of people with chronic illnesses in their own ability to manage their health and maintain active and fulfilling lives. Stanford’s comprehensive self-management program showed a cost to savings ratio of approximately 1:4. Exercise, mental stress management/relaxation and use of community resources were just some of the behaviors evaluated in the study and are a focus of the EAT SMART/MOVE MORE program.

Survey results from four seminars held in 2011 indicate 70% or more of participants plan to:

- Include calcium rich foods in their daily diets,
- Get regular exercise to help maintain good bone health,
- Choose more low-sodium foods,

- Choose more whole grain products and
- Maintain a healthy weight.

In addition, 64% of participants reported having osteoporosis or low bone density, 28% had high blood cholesterol or high blood pressure, and 30% were cancer survivors.

After reviewing program evaluations and considering participant comments and personal observations, the planning committee chose to add a financial health component to the 2012 program plan.

Survey results from four seminars held in 2012 indicate 63% or more of participants plan to:

- Look for signs of fraud,
- Take action to protect themselves from scams,
- Develop a process for passing on their non-titled property,
- Communicate with family how they want their possessions transferred,
- Fit physical activity into the things they already do,
- Do strength building activities at least twice a week, and
- Engage in balance and relaxation exercises regularly.

Demographic data reports 83% of participants were female, 89% were Caucasian, 83% were over 55 years old and 57% were from rural or small town home communities.

The Extension office will survey all participants to get their input on current needs and interests as well as content they would like to see repeated. The program planning committee will meet in December and use the information gathered to plan the 2013 EAT SMART/MOVE MORE seminars.

References

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