

UVM ScholarWorks

Improving Nutrition Education and Access to Healthy Food for Low-Income Mainers

Item Type	Presentation;Presentation
Authors	Wyn, Jessica
Download date	2026-04-15 13:15:18
Item License	http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14849/2752

Improving Nutrition Education and Access to Healthy Food for Low-Income Mainers



Jessica Wyn
Central Maine Family Medicine Residency
R6: December-January 2024
Mentor: Rachel Legendre



Food insecurity: access, knowledge and skills

- ❖ Many people in Androscoggin county are not able to consistently achieve a diet with the recommended food variety for improving health.
 - Adequate nutrition for improving health outcomes requires access to healthy food at affordable prices, health literacy regarding diet and nutrition concepts, and the skills and access to equipment required to prepare and store food.
 - A lack of resources in any one of these areas can limit a person's ability to engage in a healthy diet, which increases their risk of developing preventable non-communicable diseases later in life.¹
 - In 2022, Maine ranked 9th in the nation and 1st in New England for overall food insecurity.²
 - In Androscoggin county, 12.8% of the population lacked adequate access to food in 2022.³
- ❖ This project relates to the Social Determinants of Health and Medical Practice Transformation AHEC Core Topic Areas.

Food Insecurity and Public Health Cost

- ❖ Access to healthy foods and the skills and knowledge to build a well rounded diet is an important aspect of a healthy lifestyle.
 - The role of dietary modification in the treatment and prevention of noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and cancer, has been studied extensively. While there is disagreement on the existence of a single best diet, most experts recommend incorporating a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean sources of protein.⁴
 - In Androscoggin county over 20% of adults have been diagnosed with diabetes or heart disease, and over 14% have been diagnosed with 3 or more chronic health conditions.²
 - This is complicated by the fact that energy-dense, highly processed foods are cheaper per calorie than the recommended nutrient-dense foods.⁵
 - The price of food is one of the main factors influencing many people's food choices, and this is especially true for lower-income households. Other factors include taste and convenience, which are also usually easier to acquire via processed meals.⁵

Maine SNAP-Ed



- ❖ Maine SNAP-Ed is a program made up of nutrition educators and program coordinators located statewide who strive to provide nutrition education to low-income Mainers.⁶
 - Funded by the USDA and administered by the Office for Family Independence (OFI) at the Maine Department of Health and Human Services.
 - SNAP-Ed provides nutrition education services in settings like schools, food pantries, community rec centers and grocery stores.
- ❖ SNAP-Ed teaches cooking, meal planning, and shopping on a budget to help make healthy food more accessible for low income Mainers.
 - In a survey conducted in 2022, 100% of participants stated they will use the skills they learned in class, and that they are interested in attending more classes.⁷
- ❖ So far, SNAP-Ed has gotten the greatest exposure through events in partnership with schools or low income housing associations, and educators are interested in increasing awareness of this program at local health centers.

Community Perspective and Support

- ❖ Rachel Legendre, Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educator and Health Promotion Coordinator for Healthy Androscoggin
 - *“The most powerful marketing we do is our presence in the community itself, through the classes we teach and the meetings we attend.”*
 - *“Maintaining marketing strategies and consistent communication can also pose as challenges, but often just making the right mutual connections makes all the difference.”*
- ❖ Stephanie Elwell, LSW, Androscoggin Home Health and Central Maine Family Medicine Residency
 - *“For nutrition education, if they’re not getting it from provider, I’m not sure where else they would get that information.”*
 - *“Other than just kind of talking about nutritional facts and things that we can find online, I don’t really have an organization that I can really refer them to. Mostly it’s a lot about checking in about what they are eating and what they have access to.”*

Intervention and Methodology

- ❖ While there is enormous evidence that dietary intervention can have a great impact on patient mortality, clinicians and other healthcare employees often do not have the time to explore these topics thoroughly with patients.
- ❖ This flyer was created to provide patients with easy to understand information on nutrition, while also directing them towards other community resources. Nutritional recommendations were taken from MyPlate. Classes through SNAP-Ed were provided as an avenue for patients to learn more.
- ❖ This flyer will be displayed in the waiting room and on walls throughout the clinic, and other copies can be printed for patients to take home.

EAT HEALTHIER ON A BUDGET!

Saving money in the kitchen starts at home. Meal planning is a great way to save money at the store. The graphic below shows what proportions of food groups are recommended for a balanced diet that provides the nutrition we need.

Try to make half of your plate fruits and vegetables.
Focus on whole produce, but whether fresh, frozen, canned or dried, they're all are full of nutrients!

Meal planning Tips:
-Always check what you already have first!
-Make a list and add to it throughout the week
-Keep a running list of all the meals your family likes
-Don't forget to include snacks!

Go for low-fat or fat-free milk and yogurt:
check unit price to be sure you're getting the best deal!

Visit www.MyPlate.gov for more tips

Aim to make half your grains whole grains.
Tasty options include shredded wheat cereal, brown rice and 100% whole wheat bread.

Vary your protein.
Look for lean options and a variety, such as seafood, beans and peas, unsalted nuts and seeds, soy products, eggs, lean meats and poultry.
Plant-based proteins such as beans, lentils, peas, nuts, and seeds are other low-cost options for protein!

Interested in learning more?
SNAP-Ed is a program that offers FREE nutrition and cooking classes for people of all ages!

MAINE SNAP-Ed
Classes are a fun way to explore nutrition, cooking, grocery shopping and more!

Join Nutrition Educators from Healthy Androscoggin as you explore new recipes and tips for eating healthy on a budget and get your nutrition questions answered.

To get more information and sign up for available classes
Check out Healthy Androscoggin at www.healthyandroscoggin.org/healthy-eating

Response to Intervention

- ❖ The flyer was distributed in the waiting room and displayed on walls of Central Maine Family Medicine Residency and Safely Home clinics. It was additionally shared with the social work team and Androscoggin Home Health.
- ❖ Providers at Central Maine Family Medicine Residency responded positively to the flyer and agreed that their patients would benefit from this information.
 - They felt it provided important but basic nutritional recommendations that would be easy for patients to understand.
 - They were excited to learn more about SNAP-Ed as an educational resource for their patients.

Evaluation of effectiveness and Limitations

❖ Proposed evaluation of effectiveness

- Signing up for SNAP-Ed classes already requires participants to select where they heard about the SNAP-Ed program.
 - An increase in participants selecting “healthcare” would suggest the intervention was effective.
- Interview patients about their nutritional concerns, and evaluate how well the flyer addresses their questions.

❖ Limitations

- Time constraint to distribute flyers and track patient registration for SNAP-Ed.
- The flyer includes a QR code and SNAP-Ed has online registration, and some patients may not have a phone or reliable internet access.
- The flyer only covered general recommendations, while many patients have specific dietary questions relating to their unique conditions.

Future interventions

- ❖ Distributing this flyer to other clinics in Androscoggin county.
- ❖ Creating flyers on other dietary strategies implemented by SNAP-Ed, including grocery shopping on a budget, food storage and leftover utilization, and understanding nutritional labels.
- ❖ Increasing awareness of SNAP-Ed and other programs at Healthy Androscoggin among health networks in the community.

References

1. Graham A Colditz, MD, DrPH. Healthy diet in adults. In: UpToDate, David Seres, MD (Ed), Wolters Kluwer. (Accessed on January 8, 2024.)
2. "Multiple Chronic Conditions in Maine." America's Health Rankings, www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/measures/CHC/ME. Accessed 14 Jan. 2024.
3. "Androscoggin County, ME." Data USA, datausa.io/profile/geo/androscoggin-county-me?dietAndExerciseOptions=indicator_4. Accessed 14 Jan. 2024.
4. Noce A, Romani A, Bernini R. Dietary Intake and Chronic Disease Prevention. *Nutrients*. 2021 Apr 19;13(4):1358. doi: 10.3390/nu13041358. PMID: 33921568; PMCID: PMC8072965.
5. Darmon N, Drewnowski A. Contribution of food prices and diet cost to socioeconomic disparities in diet quality and health: a systematic review and analysis. *Nutr Rev*. 2015 Oct;73(10):643-60. doi: 10.1093/nutrit/nuv027. Epub 2015 Aug 25. PMID: 26307238; PMCID: PMC4586446.
6. "About Maine Snap-Ed - Maine Snap." Ed, 11 Jan. 2024, www.mainesnap-ed.org/maine-snap-ed/.
7. "Building a Healthier Community, Together. - Static1.Squarespace.Com." 2022 Healthy Androscoggin Annual Report, static1.squarespace.com/static/5aba4e357c9327d6d06a51a4/t/63c6a7ad4426394fd3865268/1673963441061/2022+Healthy+Androscoggin+Annual+Report.pdf. Accessed 14 Jan. 2024.