

SCIENCE & EDUCATION Impact

Benefits from USDA/Land-Grant Partnership

Slimmer Kids

Fighting childhood obesity.

Today's children weigh more and have more body fat than children did 20 years ago. At least one in five is overweight. Obesity has increased by 54 percent among 6- to 11-year-olds, contributing to the rise of Type II diabetes among children. Because obesity and its many complications place children at risk for chronic diseases later in life, obesity prevention should begin as soon as possible. Research has shown that if schoolchildren — particularly those from families with incomes at or below poverty level — get a healthy start on nutrition, their cognitive and physical development will be on course for life. And they will be at lower risk for developing heart disease, cancer and diabetes. Land-Grant University and USDA nutrition and exercise programs address youth obesity in schools, at camps and fairs, and at home.

Payoff

- **An apple a day.** Second graders in two cities received education in nutrition, food safety and physical activity using a new set of lessons developed by **North Dakota State** Extension. In follow-up tests for one city, 95 percent of the children brought lesson newsletters home, 86 percent tried new foods and 42 percent chose healthier foods as a result of the five-week program. **Delaware** Extension trained 53 teachers, school nurses, dietitians, food service managers and parents regarding dietary guidelines and then implemented Team Nutrition programs with 2,700 students at 11 schools. **Idaho's** collaborative Team Nutrition program in local elementary schools resulted in better food choices among students who were surveyed. For example, the number of students who chose baked chicken over chicken nuggets increased to 57 percent from 43 percent. Together with the Fraternity of Executive Chefs of Las Vegas, **Nevada** Extension developed Chefs for Kids, a nutrition education curriculum for local elementary schools. Now in its 12th year, the program has reached more than 12,000 students. Three years after completing the course, 65 percent of fifth graders tested could correctly categorize foods by food groups with no errors. **Purdue's** Professor Popcorn program curriculum was developed to teach first through ninth graders about nutrition and basic health through the USDA Food Guide Pyramid. Nearly 1,000 students have learned

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to eat a nutritious breakfast, consume fewer soft drinks and select nutritious snacks.

- **Farm and garden. California** Extension worked with local agencies and farmers to develop a pilot farm-to-school program for three schools featuring a garden, a salad bar called Crunch Lunch and cooking lessons in the classroom. Total school lunch participation rose an average of 25 percent during the program's first three months. Children using the salad bar ate more fruits and vegetables than if they had chosen the hot lunch. Eighty percent of the produce came from organic growers. More than 3,000 children added healthy, homegrown produce to their diets at school as a result of an **Arizona** Extension gardening program that also involved 110 teachers, 500 parents and 50 volunteers and staff. One overweight child lost 30 pounds with the change in diet.
- **The camp connection.** Research shows that many African-American children suffer from obesity. **Kentucky State** held a summer day camp for 6- to 13-year-olds that drew 78 participants last year. Results showed that the children were able to educate their parents about a balanced diet. Of 15 children who attended a **Louisiana** Extension Nutrition Day Camp, 89 percent chose a diet lower in sugar. All said they'd eat less salt and more whole grains and low-fat dairy products, based on what they learned. More than 300 underprivileged children have gone to **Georgia** Extension's Fit Families...Fit for the Future, a week-long nutrition and exercise camp for kids and their parents. One mother reported, "My daughter has shared much of the information she learned during your session of camp. She now tries to help plan our meals."
- **It all starts with mom.** Among its many advantages, breast-feeding helps prevent diabetes and obesity from developing in children. Of 200 mothers in **Alabama** Extension's Today's Mom program, 70 percent began breast-feeding their children, with 30 percent breast-feeding solely for at least six weeks and another 8 percent breast-feeding at that age and offering formula. More than 5,000 mothers breast-fed their children in a **North Carolina State**

In-Home Breast-feeding Support Program that pairs women who want to breast-feed their newborns with assistants who breast-feed their own children.

- **Slimming down for the whole family.** Because the increase in obesity of children has mirrored that of adults, **Florida A&M** created nutrition workshops that drew more than 1,600 people of all ages. Seventy-eight percent resolved to adopt one of the recommended dietary or exercise practices, and the majority planned to follow a low-fat diet and exercise daily.
- **Going professional.** Childhood obesity is a common medical problem that requires more training for doctors, nurses, nutritionists and health educators. **California** Extension's collaborative program with the state Department of Health and other groups offers a one-day training kit and an annual conference for health professionals. In 2001, more than 960 people from 29 states attended the conference.



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