

After-school cooking classes empower children and teens to make lasting healthy food choices

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TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: Chronic disease prevention, obesity, education

ABSTRACT: Fruit and vegetable consumption are core elements of a healthy diet. However, many children and teens consume few or no fruits and vegetables on an average day. Formal nutrition education alone has limited effect on nutrition and dietary behavior of youth, whereas cooking programs can positively impact children's food preferences, attitudes, and behaviors. Thus, we developed and currently evaluate Master Chefs (MC), and Fresh Grown Cooking (FGC): two after-school cooking courses (six 2-hour long sessions) for teens and upper elementary students, respectively. Both courses combine food/nutrition knowledge, kitchen safety, cooking/food preparation, and tasting. Using self-reported surveys (completed before, at the end of, 4-weeks after, and 4-months after taking the course), we observed significant and sustained improvements in youth's nutrition knowledge and basic kitchen safety skills; knowledge of new and less-familiar healthy foods; confidence and abilities in the kitchen; and ability to prepare a healthy, complete meal. Emphasis on translating principles learned in class to the home environment needs to be a continued focus.

OBJECTIVE(S): After listening to our presentation, learners will be able to: List three components of our cooking courses that may contribute to sustained improvements in children's food preferences, attitudes, and behaviors.

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