Improving Habits, Increasing Health with *Nourishing Boomers and Beyond* in Stutsman County

The Situation
Obesity, lack of exercise, and a poor diet can increase an individual’s risk of developing a chronic disease, such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and hypertension. According to the 2015 Stutsman County Community Health Assessment, 67.9 percent of adults in this county are considered overweight or obese. Obesity, as well as poor lifestyle choices, can decrease quality of life and negatively impact all areas of the body, including the heart, brain, muscles, digestive system, and bones/joints, among others. Based on the 2015 Stutsman County Community Health Data from the North Dakota Department of Health, over 40 percent of the population in Stutsman County are 50 years of age or older. The leading causes of death for this age group in the county are cancer and heart disease.

Extension Response
In order to reduce the risk of chronic disease caused by obesity, inactivity, and poor nutrition, one must make long-term lifestyle changes that includes healthy eating and regular physical activity. The NDSU Extension Service offers a program series titled *Nourishing Boomers and Beyond*, intending to assist North Dakotans aged 50 and older with living a healthier lifestyle through better nutrition and increased physical activity. The program offers classes, take-home materials that include healthy recipes, and a variety of supplemental web-based information such as a monthly e-newsletter and daily Facebook posts. Christina Rittenbach delivered these classes on a monthly basis for two years in Stutsman County, reaching 75 individuals. The typical class size on a month-to-month basis was around 15-20 people. In addition, 77% of follow-up respondents indicated that they have shared the information they learned with others. Of those respondents, two of them stated that others have changed or been encouraged to change to a healthier lifestyle due to the information shared with them.

Impacts
Questionnaires were administered to the participants at the conclusion of each monthly class. When the series ended after year two, participants from both years were given another questionnaire to assess any behavioral changes that occurred over the past year or two since participating in the program. According to data from three of the lessons (*Nourish Your Heart, Muscles and Digestive System*), the majority of participants reported that they intended to:
- Use the physical activity DVD provided to them in the *Nourish Your Muscles* lesson (87.5%)
- Eat more high-fiber foods (75%)
- Eat more fruits and vegetables (84%)
- Choose foods that are lower in sodium (75%)
- Avoid foods that contain trans fat (81%)
- Been choosing healthier foods (69%)
- Increased their physical activity (77%)
- Seen overall improvements in their health (54%)

Overall, 70% of participants from these lessons stated that they would make healthier food choices, and 62.5% stated they would increase their physical activity. Thirteen participants from both years of classes participated in the follow-up survey. They reported that since participating in the program, they have:
- Been choosing healthier foods (69%)
- Increased their physical activity (77%)
- Seen overall improvements in their health (54%)

In addition, 77% of follow-up respondents indicated that they have shared the information they learned with others. Of those respondents, two of them stated that others have changed or been encouraged to change to a healthier lifestyle due to the information shared with them.

Feedback
“[Since participating in this program, my] blood pressure is more even [and] cholesterol is good.”

“[Since participating in this program, I have] more energy [and spend] less time being sick.”

“All of the classes were very worth going to…I learned something new in every class I attended. I kept all of the information from each of the classes so I can refer to it whenever I need to.”

Public Value Statement
Participants in this program made healthier choices and improved their health, thus decreasing health care costs for all and increasing work and family time productivity.

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