

PILOT PROJECT

The Effectiveness of Knowledge, Tools and Support for Healthy Eating

BACKGROUND

For many individuals and families, maintaining a healthy lifestyle is an important, albeit challenging, goal. Living a healthy lifestyle is not only important for families, but in the larger scope of our communities and across our country, can significantly enhance our national prosperity.

It is predicted that without a drastic and complete upheaval of our current system, one in three babies born today will develop diabetes in their lifetime. The rate of obesity, one of the most important risk factors in developing chronic disease, has tripled in children aged two to eleven. The beginning stages of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) has been found in children as young as three years of age.

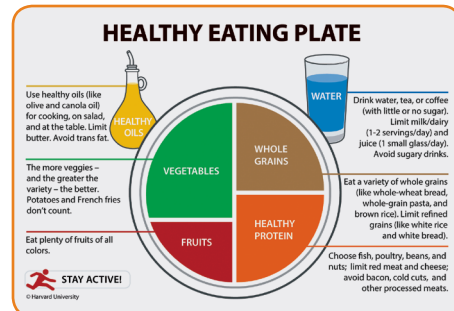
If we continue on this path, we will experience the first generation of children in America who live shorter, less healthy lives than their parents.

THE PILOT PROCESS

Grow Your Family Strong (GYFS), in partnership with Hope Street Group (HSG), conducted a five week healthy eating program with more than 60 families in the Washington, DC area.

Participants were recruited through different avenues including online forums, posters, clinics, grocery store visits, schools and word of mouth.

GYFS provided content to participating families primarily online through its website and via emails. Materials included family-friendly nutritious recipes, meal preparation guides, and grocery shopping lists.



The meals were modeled after the Harvard Healthy Plate¹ which calls for one-half of one's plate to be fruits or vegetables and focuses on integrating whole grains and healthy fats.

Participants received education on why eating wholesome, homemade foods is so important. Articles about nutrition and ongoing educational programming was provided by top experts from multiple fields.

The content was supplemented with ongoing support, both from GYFS and HSG staff, and participants were encouraged to communicate with others in the pilot, in order to form a supportive community atmosphere.



Grow Your Family Strong (GYFS) is a

new venture that helps families elevate nutrition for health and happiness. GYFS is building a new technology platform in 2014 to provide busy parents with practical tools, a supportive community, and actionable knowledge to take control of their family's nutrition.



HSG is a national, nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to expanding economic opportunity and prosperity for all Americans. By working in the top three drivers of economic opportunity – education, health and jobs – HSG brings together leaders and practitioners across sectors to solve some of our nation's most pressing issues.

PILOT PARTICIPANTS

- The majority of the pilot program participants resided in the Washington, DC metro area.
- Approximately 30% were designated as low-income, based on their available food budget. Of those, about 10% received some sort of governmental food assistance.
- The majority self-identified as Caucasian; 40% identified as Hispanic, Asian, African American or biracial.
- Family households included single-parent, dual-career, stay-at-home parent, and those who cared for aging parents.
- All participants took a self-reported pre- and a post-survey. The results were analyzed in combination with results from daily surveys and weekly check-in conversations.

¹ www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-eating-plate

Healthy Eating Pilot Project: Results, Insights and Highlights

HEALTHY IMPROVEMENT

Improvements in healthy eating, wellness, and support

Nearly 80% of participants reported in their post survey that they were eating more than five servings of fruits and vegetables per week during the pilot.

Those who reported eating two or more servings of red meat per week dropped from 37% to under 7%. Participants who said that they felt very healthy grew from 37% to 55%, and 45% reported more energy.

Many felt that they had fantastic support from their partners both before and after the pilot; 32% felt they were receiving more help in the kitchen because of the pilot.

TOOLS & KNOWLEDGE

Providing tools & knowledge help empower healthy eating

Providing a comprehensive suite of online tools and resources focused on healthy eating helped individuals feel confident in their ability to feed themselves and their families well.



Certain interventions, such as implementing a prep day on Sunday or simply having a weekly meal plan, unlocked a lot of capable feelings.

By the end of the program, roughly 61% of participants said they felt more confident in their ability to feed their children nutritious foods and 57% felt more confident with their knowledge about nutrition.

INTERVENTION SUCCESS

Interventions do work - with both children and adults

The pilot successfully increased the consumption of healthy foods, including fresh produce and whole grains, in both children and adults.

Despite the common perception that an adult's ingrained habits are hard to change, pilot results showed adults had a higher improvement rate in eating habits than children.

During the pilot, adults who ate five or more servings of fruits and vegetables grew from 42% to nearly 80%; children receiving five or more servings of fruits and vegetables also increased from 39% to 56%.

Similarly, 70% of adults reported an increase in their whole grain consumption, and 50% of parents felt their children were also eating more whole grains.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Community support bolsters enthusiasm for healthy eating

Participants were placed into teams based on similar geography, affiliations, and/or preferences.

Those who engaged with their teams, created new teams, and/or relied on the support of the GYFS/HSG staff, generally had positive experiences; 35% found team interactions helpful in their efforts to complete the program.

One-third of these participants felt that team connections could be expanded to a larger network and would be interested in a community marketplace where shared efforts (cooking, shopping, etc.) related to healthy eating could be exchanged.

Of those who found the community aspect helpful, 70% will continue with the program in some way.

Grow Your Family Strong: Testimonials

Jennifer L.

"I have so much energy, it's crazy! I don't feel that bloated, sluggish, tired feeling I used to feel with my unhealthy diet. I feel great!"

Kathryn S.

"My biggest takeaway from the program has been learning to do meal prep on Sunday and on weeknights."

Celia P.

"I feel like a lot of stress has been taken off of me, in terms of deciding every meal and doing all of the grocery shopping, preparation and worrying about planning."

Lauren B.

"The baby and I both learned that we like pomegranate seeds, so I'm thrilled to have a new snack for her."

Celine F.

"Without the team interaction, I think I would have given up. The interaction is what made me follow through."

Cristina T.

"It is nice to have a group of moms you can email and ask for advice and tips on where to find ingredients, and just to generally hear about their experiences through emails, blog posts and Facebook."

Over 90% of participants said they would recommend the Grow Your Family Strong program to a friend.