

## **Men's Cooking Groups**

Keller, H. H., Gibbs, A., Wong, S., Vanderkooy, P., Hedley, M. (2004) *Men Can Cook! Development, Implementation, and Evaluation of a Senior Men's Cooking Group*. *J Nutr Elderly*, 24 (1):71-87

### **Why are Men's Cooking Groups needed?**

Nutrition among seniors, especially older men, is of increasing importance in our population. Men, specifically those who live alone, have been identified to be at high nutrition risk (about 50%). Older males often have less experience in buying groceries, preparing meals, and eating a range of different foods, than their female peers. Traditionally, nutrition programs have been aimed at the woman of the house, and have therefore excluded men when providing information on healthy eating and diet. Evergreen Action Nutrition (EAN) is a nutrition education program run out of a seniors centre in Guelph, Ontario. EAN aims to improve the nutritional status of seniors through food demonstrations and informative displays on a range of topics that are chosen by older adults. EAN began a Men's Cooking Group as part of an effort to decrease their risk and increase the knowledge and skills men have around nutrition and cooking.

### **What was done?**

In the second year of EAN programming, the Men's Cooking Group ran once a month for 8 months. A planning committee made up of seniors from the centre brainstormed possible themes for the group, and sent out a questionnaire to gauge what sort of topics would be received well by male participants. The results of the questionnaire were used in program planning by the committee and the nutrition educator. Each session was two hours long and allowed the group to prepare and share a meal. Sessions were open to all male EAN members, and ran on a "pay as you go" system, so people did not have to commit to a certain number of classes. The nutrition educator ran the sessions by describing the overall menu, handing out recipes and working with members through the cooking process to help them build their skills. The program's main goals included increasing confidence to cook, improving attitudes towards healthy eating and encouraging friendships among the men at the group. After eight months, a follow-up questionnaire was used to evaluate the activity.

### **What we found?**

The cooking groups were very successful in helping men build confidence around cooking, develop an understanding of healthy nutrition, and increase cooking skills. The participants described gradually growing more confident with cooking as they progressed through the months, and being less hesitant to make meals more often. The men also said that the social aspect of the cooking group was very valuable. Most men started the group not knowing one another, yet over the eight months began to feel a comfortable "camaraderie" with their peers. Single men in particular enjoyed the opportunity to get together with people, laugh and learn new skills around the kitchen. One of the overall goals of EAN was to improve the intake of healthy foods, and the evaluation results indicated that a large number of men learned strategies to include vegetables and fiber in their diets, in place of fats and sodium.

### **Importance of this research:**

The success of the EAN Men's Cooking Group suggests that programs like this, which present nutrition information in a comfortable, practical, and casual manner may influence nutrition risk in seniors. The fact that over 90% of the men stated they planned

to continue with the group suggests that EAN provided an arena for male seniors to learn and bond, while promoting good health.

**Applying what was found:**

The EAN Men's Cooking Group model shows that providing community based cooking classes is a useful and powerful way to incorporate learning and fun around nutritional issues for men.