Adopting Healthy Habits in Nutrition

**Project(s):** Use of social media and mobile technology in nutrition outreach and education (Dollahite; 2012 – 2015).

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**Need:** In 2012, more than one third of children and adolescents were overweight or obese. The prevalence of child obesity has prompted interventions to increase awareness and improve family health. Unfortunately, this growing need is often at odds with the limitations of long-term, in-person contact with extension program participants. Electronic communications by text message or social media are enticing and cost effective options with potential to increase the frequency and effectiveness of messaging. This study piloted a new electronic component to existing Cooperative Extension nutrition education programs (EFNEP and SNAP-Ed).

**Approach:** National data indicate that while the "digital divide" is shrinking, socio-economic factors continue to affect internet access and usage. Dollahite and her team designed a survey- and focus group-based study to determine the feasibility of delivering health, nutrition, and physical activity information to low-income parents in the EFNEP and SNAP-Ed nutrition programs. They surveyed 1640 program participants and conducted 9 focus groups across a variety of geographies, urban and rural locations, and ethnic groups to determine interest in receiving nutrition information post-graduation and their preferred delivery methods.

**Results and Impact:** The survey and focus group results overwhelmingly revealed that participants were interested in receiving ongoing communication after graduation. Participants reported having access to text messages and social media, and they were largely familiar with social networking sites. They placed high value on the reliability of CCE-developed materials and suggested a wide range of topics, including healthy recipes and smart shopping tips. Facebook was their preferred method of communication, so the "Adopting Healthy Habits" page was developed for communication with graduates. In the first three months, the average post “reach” rose by 198%, and the number of page “likes” increased by 136%, both indicators that the page is active, growing, and valued by participants. The social media enhancement extends the reach and increases the impact of nutritional programs by fostering an informative and supportive community outside of the courses.

**Related Information:**
- [Adopting Healthy Habits](#) (Facebook page)
- [Food and Nutrition Education in Communities](#)
- [Cornell Nutrition Works](#)
- [Regional Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Centers of Excellence](#)