



Nutrition Education Assistants are the backbone of the EFNEP program: they talk with homemakers, they explain, they exhort, they guide. It all starts in the kitchen with a look at the week's specials, followed by a trip to the store, and a return to the kitchen, to prepare a meal. Seen here demonstrating the steps are Rita Velasquez, left, and Eva McAntee, right, in all three photos. Both are NEA's in Sacramento County.

# Adult EFNEP: The first 10 years

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*What the homemaker eats is a reflection of what her family eats.*

Since 1969 more than 100,000 homemakers in California have enrolled in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), the federally-funded program designed to help low-income families improve their diets. The eating patterns of these homemakers—before and after instruction—have been recorded since the program's inception, and these records document improvements in nutrition as a result of the program and provide a detailed picture of eating habits of low-income Californians.

The program concentrates on the homemaker because what the homemaker eats is a reflection of what her family eats. Her diet, EFNEP has found, is distressingly poor. Only one in 20 has an adequate diet, and only about half have even a minimal diet (see table 1). After EFNEP instruction,

the number of homemakers on adequate diets increases to one in three and more than 80 percent achieve a diet that is at least minimally adequate. This achievement is accomplished at no increase in the family's food costs.

EFNEP's target is the family with the most limited resources. Federal guidelines set forth an eligibility formula adjusted for inflation. In 1978 an urban family of four, with an income of less than \$6,200, could qualify. Of the homemakers who have enrolled in the California program, one-third had an eighth grade education or less, and more than two-thirds were members of racial or ethnic minorities. Seventeen counties presently participate in the program.

## Measuring food habits

Four basic food groups form the basis

for teaching nutrition and for measuring the program's results. According to this food grouping, a slightly active adult should eat each day a minimum of:

- Two servings of milk or milk products
- Two servings of meat or meat alternates
- Four servings of bread or cereals
- Four servings of fruits and vegetables

This diet (2-2-4-4) is classified as adequate. One serving from each food group (1-1-1-1) is regarded as minimal.

Eating patterns are measured by having the homemaker recall what she has eaten in a 24-hour period at the time the family is enrolled, after 6 months of basic instruction, and at the end of a year.

## Eating patterns at enrollment

Consumption of milk products and fruits and vegetables typically was defi-



cient. At enrollment, only about one-third of the homemakers had two servings of milk products, and about one in five had four servings of fruits and vegetables. Diets were generally more adequate in meat and cereal foods. Nearly three-fourths of the homemakers had two servings of meat and meat alternates, and about half had four servings of cereal foods. (See table 2.)

### EFNEP instruction

Nutrition Education Assistants (NEA's) teach one client or small groups, most often in a home. Generally, basic instruction continues for six months with about 20 hours of lessons tailored to individual circumstances and food habits.

Meal planning, shopping skills, and safe food preparation are taught, with the emphasis on nutrition and the four food groups. Special attention is given to foods rich in calcium, vitamins A and C, and iron, because even a 2-2-4-4 diet does not necessarily provide enough of these nutrients. A bilingual newsletter, *Nutrition/Nutricion*, is provided for EFNEP families.

After basic instruction and the 6-month food recall are completed, homemakers receive occasional visits by the NEA. At 12 months a followup food recall is taken.

### Program results

Improvements in eating habits have been remarkably consistent. Consumption of a 2-2-4-4 diet increases from about 5 percent

of enrollees to more than 20 percent at the 6-month food recall and to about one-third at the 12-month recall. The one-half who have a 1-1-1-1 diet at the start increases to about 80 percent in 6 months and to slightly higher at 12 months (see table 3).

### California's accomplishments

EFNEP instruction has become increasingly efficient. Improvements in eating patterns that once required a year are now achieved in six months and there is greater improvement in eating patterns, as seen in tables 3 and 4. For example, table 4 shows the progression of effectiveness in instruction by improvements in minimally adequate diets. In 1971, 62 percent were on a minimal diet when they began the program. This figure went up to 73.9 percent at 6 months and to 80.8 percent at 12 months.

In 1978, 51.7 percent started with minimal diets, increasing to 84.1 percent at six months and to 87 percent at 12 months.

Nationwide statistics for EFNEP show a similar starting point in recent years for minimal diets, 51.8 percent. But, in contrast to California's achievement, the national average for minimal diets—after two years of instruction—is 76.6 percent.

California's program has also become more efficient in using money. Funding has remained the same, \$2.3 million over the last eight years, but actual support has steadily decreased because of inflation. Yet the size of the program—some 10,000 new families enrolled every year—has been maintained.

Accomplishments go beyond improvements in eating patterns. There are related improvements, for example, in food buy-



ing and food handling and less tangible, but equally important, changes in the lives of the homemakers who enroll.

Instruction in food buying skills helps keep family food costs down. Expenditures for food at the time homemakers enroll consistently averages 31 percent of family income. At one time this was reduced, on the average, to 29 percent. Now, with food prices up, costs remain at 31 percent of family income—but the money goes for a much improved diet.

Finally, EFNEP has many times brought about positive changes in the lives it touches. Often homemakers are referred to other agencies in the community that can help them. They begin to take more pride in the role of homemaker and to take better care of themselves and of their homes. Many report feeling less buffeted by circumstance and more in charge of their lives, able to set goals and to work towards them.

In summary, the program in 10 years has delivered a consistently improving return for tax dollars. Further, the increased knowledge and changed attitudes brought about by EFNEP are producing continuing benefits for the homemakers who have enrolled—and for society.

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**TABLE 1. Eating Patterns Before EFNEP Instruction**

Year	Adequate diet %	Minimal diet %
1978	4.7	51.7
1977	6.0	56.2
1976	5.0	55.5
1975	6.0	61.1
1974	6.9	64.1
1973	7.3	60.3
1972	5.5	56.4
1971	8.1	62.0
1970	10.0*	65.6
1969	15.6*	59.5

\*These percentages, recorded at the program outset, probably do not represent a higher level of adequate diets among low income families in general, but rather eating patterns of those initial enrollees who were probably community leaders and/or more concerned about nutrition to begin with.

**TABLE 2. Percentage Consuming Recommended Servings Before EFNEP Instruction**

Year	Milk %	Fruit/Vegetable %	Meat and alternates %	Cereal %
1978	31.4	16.6	69.0	47.9
1977	36.3	18.7	73.6	49.7
1976	35.1	19.4	73.3	49.7
1975	37.8	21.5	68.2	52.8
1974	39.6	20.2	67.5	50.9
1973	38.3	20.1	77.4	49.1
1972	38.6	20.0	78.6	44.4
1971	40.9	23.6	62.4	43.5
1970	47.1	20.1	80.4	34.4
1969	40.1	15.5	73.6	36.9

**TABLE 3. Percentage Consuming Adequate Diet (2-2-4-4)**

Year	Start %	6 months %	12 months %
1978	4.7	22.6	35.7
1977	6.0	27.5	31.0
1976	5.0	22.9	34.8
1975	6.0	22.6	35.7
1974	6.9	24.7	35.7
1973	7.3	20.3	29.8
1972	5.5	27.7	23.0
1971	8.1	17.0	21.0
1970	10.0	13.0	—
1969	15.6	—	—

**TABLE 4. Percentage Consuming Minimal Diet (1-1-1-1)**

Year	Start %	6 months %	12 months %
1978	51.7	84.1	87.0
1977	56.2	85.2	81.8
1976	55.5	73.9	86.8
1975	61.1	82.09	89.4
1974	64.1	80.1	86.0
1973	60.3	80.3	83.4
1972	56.4	74.3	81.8
1971	62.0	73.9	80.8
1970	60.6	69.8	—
1969	59.5	—	—

An illustrated chart in two languages, English and Spanish, *A Daily Guide for Good Nutrition*, helps an NEA explain to a homemaker the number of servings from each food group that should be offered each day to her family.

