

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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Creative classes help make holidays healthy

Food is a big part of our lives. It can be part of who we are, where we came from, and how we express ourselves. This is especially true when it comes to food and the holidays. In an effort to encourage and educate people how to keep their health a priority during the holidays, University of Illinois Extension Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—Education (SNAP-Ed) staff created and taught Holiday MyPlate nutrition lessons and cooking classes.

“We understand that many holidays contain some of our favorite comfort foods,” noted Skye Mibbs, SNAP-Ed instructor, “and it’s hard to avoid overeating and staying active when all those delicious treats and sweets are included in our celebrations. Our team came together to plan a timely and impactful program.”

Participants enjoyed monthly, holiday-themed lessons like “Gobble and Go” and “New Year, New Food, New Me”. The lessons focused on active, healthy living and tips to keep that in balance through the holidays.

“Throughout the series participants gained a lot of cooking skills and ways to help keep their home healthy during the holidays. The lessons included how to make no bake pumpkin pie for Thanksgiving and ways to balance our food & physical activity. In December they competed in a chili cookoff between White Chili and Quick Chili to see which would be the tastiest warm up for the winter holidays and how to best incorporate more vegetables and fruits into meals. Next, adults and kids joined us for New Years, created the healthy snack Apple Nachos, and discussed how to make family time more active and fun. Finally for Valentine’s Day, they made a heart healthy, delicious date-night-in recipe, Skillet Spaghetti with Turkey Meatballs, and had a chance to learn about other family meal tips,” explained Skye.

In addition to offering the fun, interactive classes SNAP-Education was able to partner with their local food bank, Peoria Area Food Bank, to offer free recipe boxes to participants. This opportunity gave families the chance to take all they learned from the lesson and put it into action in their own home. Recipe kits included all the needed ingredients to recreate the recipe from the class as well as a free cooking utensil. Extension staff noticed an increase in program participation when the gift bags were offered.

“By working in collaboration with our partners, we were able to enhance the class even further for participants,” stated SNAP-Ed Program Coordinator Rebecca Crumrine. “It is through innovative, collaborative approaches like this one that we continue to offer the best education we can to the community and positively impact our families, so the healthier choice can become the easier choice.”

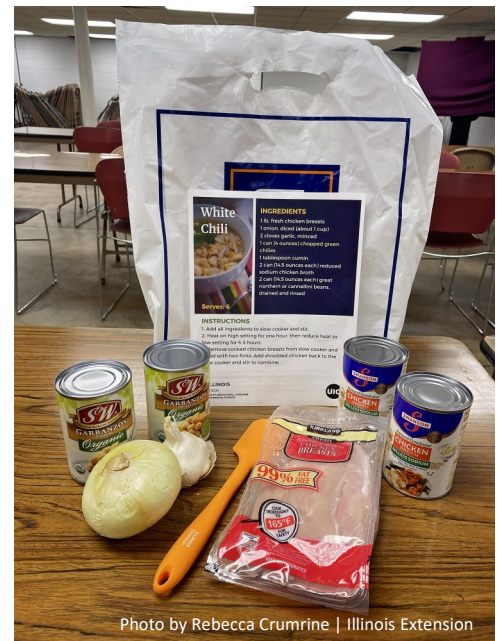


Photo by Rebecca Crumrine | Illinois Extension

Thanks to a partnership with Peoria Area Food Bank, Holiday MyPlate participants took home all of the ingredients for the recipes taught during a three session SNAP-Ed program. The program taught cooking skills that complimented the active, healthy living holiday-themed lessons.

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