

Targeted Messages Spur Healthy Eating in Young Tailored approach gets college-age adults eating fruits, veggies

(HealthDay News) -- 'Eat your fruits and vegetables:' Most Americans know that's good advice, but are the nation's college-age adults listening?

According to nutrition researchers, the answer is 'yes' -- if that message is delivered in the right way and tailored to meet young people's particular needs and lifestyles.

"Even though young adults are incredibly busy, they still want to know what they can do to improve their health," University of Wisconsin-Madison nutritional scientist Susan Nitzke said in a prepared statement.

She spoke Feb. 20 at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science annual meeting in Washington, D.C.

Nitzke was lead investigator of an multi-state study designed to increase fruit and vegetable consumption among economically disadvantaged young adults.

She believes that, ideally, nutritional information for young adults should be brief, practical and tailored to each individual's specific interests. For example, a person who hasn't thought much about healthy eating may require basic information about good nutrition. But someone who already understands the importance of good nutrition may prefer quick and easy recipes that use fresh fruits and vegetables.

Over a period of two years, the Wisconsin team conducted three rounds of interviews with more than 1,200 low-income adults, aged

18 to 24. In between those interviews, some of the study volunteers also received phone calls and materials tailored to their individual level of readiness to make changes in their diet. Other participants received only a standard, one-size-fits-all pamphlet on nutrition.

"The participants who received the tailored intervention progressed in their ability to eat five or more servings of fruit and vegetables a day, while no such progress was made in the group that got only standard information," Nitzke reported.

"People who don't eat many fruits or vegetables often cite reasons like inconvenience and a lack of knowledge about how to use fresh ingredients," she said, adding that "it becomes particularly difficult for economically disadvantaged individuals because of the perception that fresh fruits and vegetables are expensive."

More information

The American Academy of Family Physicians has more about nutrition.

By Robert Preidt

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