

Summer wellness in the park: Fostering healthy habits through interactive activities

AT A GLANCE

Eat Smart Idaho promotes healthy behaviors and learning opportunities through interactive activities to support children wellness during the summer break.

The Situation

Four of the leading causes of death in Idaho are linked to poor diet and physical inactivity. Developing healthy eating habits and an active lifestyle during childhood are supportive of both children's growth and development and reducing the risks of chronic disease later in adulthood. Yet, 37.4% of Idaho adolescents reported eating vegetables less than one time per day. Only 22.2% of high schoolers are physically active for the recommended 60 minutes daily. With children out of school during summer break, opportunities to provide nutrition education and encourage healthy behaviors can dwindle.

Our Response

Eat Smart Idaho participated in the Chobani Summer Program in Twin Falls and Jerome at the parks, a 13-week program primarily focused on closing the summer food gap. While families received free meals each week at local parks, we enhanced the experience by offering engaging physical activities and hands-on food exploration for children and families. The goal was to make nutrition education and healthy living fun, accessible and family-centered to support children's growth and lifelong wellness.



Eat Smart Idaho set up an educational booth with food tastings, recipe cards and nutrition education materials at the park.

Program Outcomes

From June through August, Eat Smart Idaho connected with 1,947 children and families through interactive, educational and fun activities. Each week, we brought nutrition education coupled with hands-on experiences to encourage healthy habits and wellness. These included food tastings, gardening exploration and physical activity.

Food engagement and tastings:

- Infused water activity: 117 participants made their own flavored water using cold water, lemon zest, frozen fruits and fresh herbs – introducing a refreshing alternative to sugary drinks.

- Taste-testing stations: Nearly 1,700 children and adults sampled a variety of fruits and vegetables in different forms – fresh, dried, baked or as a dip.
- 93% of participants reported liking the food.
- 88% of participants reported that they would eat them again.
- Participants expressed appreciation of being introduced to new foods, new texture and new flavors.
- Parents and caregivers also took home healthy, budget-friendly recipe cards to make healthy meals and snacks at home.

Results from taste tests:

Food Item	Number of participants tried the item	Percentage of participants liked it (%)	Percentage of participants would eat again (%)
Mini peppers	70	91%	89%
Jicama	120	98%	84%
Hummus	156	81%	77%
Snap pea	156	84%	82%
Dried mango	350	97%	91%
Dried apricot	155	86%	77%
Grapes	210	94%	92%
Zucchini	247	99%	95%
Tomatoes	195	86%	78%

Gardening exploration:

- Cilantro planting activity: 56 children and 35 adults planted cilantro seeds in a cup – connecting them to where food comes from, sparking interest in gardening and using herbs to flavor dishes.

Physical activity and play:

- 80 children participated in movement-based activities to keep them active and socially engaged.

Our efforts have successfully sparked curiosity and laid the foundation for healthier habits. Many children tried fruits and vegetables they had never eaten before – and discovered they liked them. Parents and caregivers expressed gratitude for the opportunity to learn and experience in a supportive space.

The Future

We are thrilled with the success of this year's summer program and look forward to partnering with community organizations again next year to continue enriching the lives of local families during summer.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

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