



Why 4-H Choose Health?



4-H Choose Health promotes healthy living through activity and nutrition



<http://nys4h.cce.cornell.edu/>

Choose Health combines the strengths of young people with research and programming focused on healthy lifestyles to make positive changes in the way we live.

Learning to make healthy choices is at the core of 4-H youth development's basic values.

"Health" is, after all, the 4th H following Head, Heart and Hands. 4-H has become a national leader in health-related educational issues, including chemical health, mental and emotional health, foods and nutrition, physical health and safety.

Helping communities make healthy choices

Healthy living has always been a hallmark of the 4-H program – so important that it's one of the four "H's" in our pledge. But today's society doesn't make it easy to live a healthy lifestyle. With an abundance of unhealthy food choices and an increase in sedentary activities like television and video games, it comes as no surprise that childhood obesity is skyrocketing.

The 4-H Choose Health initiative builds on numerous tested research-based curricular and other resources at county, state and federal levels to promote healthy eating and active living among children, youth, families, and communities

Our efforts are focused on several fronts:

- Creating healthier environments at 4-H camps;
- Developing a core group of teen ambassadors and mentors to educate others about making healthy choices;
- Initiating a series of promotional efforts at statewide events like State Fair and Career Explorations.
- Training adults and youth involved in 4-H to spread the message to their communities.

The Choose Health message emphasizes healthy eating, physical activity and changes that can be made in the home, school and community to encourage health.

Research shows that when people develop healthy behaviors in



The 4-H Choose Health initiative makes healthy eating and physical activity a part of everyday life .

their youth, they're more likely to sustain them throughout their life. Changes can be as simple as parking farther away from the mall or choosing not to purchase sugar-added beverages. The Choose Health initiative also helps people learn how to:

- Work with community leaders to create walk-friendly spaces.
- Sponsor local farmer's markets and community gardens.
- Make nutritious choices for snacks and beverages.
- Find creative ways to include more movement in your day.
- Include fruits and vegetables with every meal.
- Eat local foods to improve personal health and the environment.

Teen ambassadors lead effort to spread the news

To expand the reach of the Choose Health message, teens from across the state have been recruited to be educators, mentors, planners and to act as good role models for others.

The teens who serve as Choose Health Ambassadors have been trained to lead classroom activities on healthy eating and physical activity. They're also working with adults to focus on health-related community action projects.

"We believe that teenagers who have been trained in delivering messages about healthy eating and physical activity can have a special impact on younger children," says Barbara Schirmer, New York State program leader for 4-H Youth Development.

Choose Health Ambassadors, while helping educate others about healthy living, are also gaining valuable leadership skills working with children, adults and other teens.

"It's so much easier to start out with healthy habits than try to fix unhealthy habits," said Emily MacIntosh, a 16-year-old Choose Health ambassador from Kinderhook. "By teaching youth healthy habits now, they can have happier and healthier lives later."

So far, the teens' work has impressed 4-H staff. "They are a very enthusiastic group, eager to learn and apply their knowledge to helping others be healthy" said Wendy Wolfe, an extension associate in the Division of Nutritional

Sciences involved in the Choose Health initiative.



Choose Health Ambassadors will teach younger children about healthy lifestyles and work on community projects.

Summer camps explore healthier options

"Camp directors already instituted many changes, like serving water at every meal, eliminating soda from the camp store and offering fruit at snack times."

*-Wendy Wolfe,
extension associate in
the Division of
Nutritional Sciences*

One of the first areas of focus for the Choose Health program was 4-H summer camps, which operate throughout the state and host about 5,500 children each year.

The director of Cornell Cooperative Extension awarded a grant to a team of CCE educators and campus partners to improve the health environment for campers through teen-led activities and changes in their programs and procedures.

In the summer of 2008, 4-H teen Counselors in Training were recruited to investigate the state of their camps. These teens learned about the availability of healthy food and beverage choices, measured campers' physical activity levels, kept track of the instruction offered related to health and nutrition and looked at whether counselors and directors acted as good role models.

What they found wasn't surprising, said Wendy Wolfe, an extension associate in the Division of

Nutritional Sciences and co-chair of the 4-H Healthy Lifestyles Program Work Team.

"Camps are trying to find foods that kids like, that are also healthy and low-cost," Wolfe said. "But it's challenging to find foods that meet all three of these criteria."

While many camps offered adequate time to eat meals and plenty of active play time each day, they also frequently served high-sugar beverages and didn't always offer vegetables or fruit as part of the day's snack.

After researching a detailed list of 31 questions, the teen counselors reported and made recommendations to camp directors.

"Camp directors gave lots of positive feedback about the research done by teens," Wolfe says. Some of the changes that have already started include:

- Adding salad bars to camp



4-H camps will be adding more whole grains and fruits and vegetables to their menus.

cafeterias.

- Encouraging campers to bring along only healthy snacks.
- Selling healthier snacks at the camp store.
- Improving the availability and taste of water.
- Offering low-fat salad dressings.
- Offering more vegetarian options
- These are simple choices that make choosing health an easier option

Resources, events help promote Choose Health

Find out more:

To learn more about Choose Health, visit:

<http://nys4h.cce.cornell.edu>

New York State 4-H Youth Development
Cornell Cooperative Extension
340 Roberts Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853
607-255-0896

Visit the NYS 4-H Resource Directory:
<http://www.cerp.cornell.edu/4h>

From pedometers to GPS mapping, the Choose Health campaign is using a variety of tools to promote its message.

At the 2008 New York State Fair, attendees could make healthier choices among all of the delicious fair food by visiting the 4-H youth building. Teen 4-H members had created a GPS map of restaurants offering healthier options, which visitors could search on a bank of computers. They were also invited to test their fitness by taking part in a fitness trail.

Also at the fair, as well as the annual Career Explorations conference at Cornell, youth participants were challenged to walk 10,000 steps or

more each day. During the fair, 360 4-H members walked a total of 5,923 miles — roughly the equivalent of walking from Albany to Los Angeles and back.

The Choose Health Web site offers a number of resources for staff, parents, youth and teachers, including links to state 4-H programs like "Cooking Up Fun" and "Just Move."

The site also contains healthy living fact cards, a sample fitness trail, counting charts for a walking challenge and bookmarks, as well as links to Cornell research related to healthy eating and childhood



Choose Health aims to make healthy choices the norm for youth and families.

obesity. The Choose Health blog at the site, offers links to everything from Disney's "Pass the Plate" show on healthy eating to games for youth based on healthy lifestyles.

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