Healthy Eating in the Heartland
Nessie Ferguson, MS, RD, CDE and Cynthia L. Van Riper, MS, RD, CDE
The Nebraska Medical Center, Diabetes Center and Munroe-Meyer Institute, University of Nebraska Medical Center

OBJECTIVE
Provide participants with practical, hands-on demonstrations of recipes that focus on whole grains, healthy fats, lean and plant proteins, and low fat cooking techniques that taste good.

METHODS
A versatile, portable, “kitchen-less” healthy cooking demonstration is offered in multiple community-based venues. Basic equipment was procured through a one-time grant. Recipes are tailored to the intended audience, e.g., simple 5-ingredient recipes for children with diabetes; modified “soul” food recipes for a local “Sisters Together” chapter; holiday recipes for a quarterly diabetes class scheduled in November; calcium-rich foods for “Red Hat” ladies. For ongoing classes, participants make suggestions for themes of subsequent classes. Printed recipes, samples of food items, and information, samples and/or coupons for new products on the market are provided to participants in a forum that offers both group support and allows an opportunity to ask questions from a nutrition expert.

Instructor Tips: Adult Classes
- Select healthy recipes for each category: beverages, appetizers, side dish, entrée, and dessert. Prepare recipe booklet and make copies for participants.
- Send out flyer with RSVP to ensure adequate time for grocery shopping.
- Pre-prep menu items the day before, and group according to recipe.
- Save all food packaging containers for demonstrations during class, and discuss where to purchase, along with tips on preparation and shopping.
- Arrange tables in a U shape, with cooking demonstration at the open end.
- Provide product update for new items on the market, i.e., foods with cholesterol-lowering stanols added to them, new sugar substitutes, reformulated foods that now have lower fat or higher fiber, new “trans-fat” labeling.
- Distribute samples of food items and discuss pros/cons of each recipe/food item.
- Have a sign-up table and area to pay for the class. Offer “door prizes”.
- Discuss future class topics that the participants would like to attend.
- Give out door prizes, making sure that everyone wins something.
- Have magazines/cookbooks available with current recipes used.

Instructor Tips: Diabetes Camp Classes for Children with Diabetes
- Compile and print recipe books prior to the start of camp.
- Grocery items needed are purchased and brought to camp, along with cooking equipment.
- Give each camper the opportunity to take part in the classes, e.g., measuring items, stirring bowls, using blenders, etc.
- Limit recipes to 5-6 ingredients
- Simplify cooking methods, e.g., microwaves, blenders, frozen dessert items.
- Dietetic Interns teaching classes conduct question/answer periods throughout the sessions based on reinforcement of healthy eating goals. Interns have the campers read labels for CHO content.
- Cabin groups will often make their afternoon snack in morning cooking classes.
- If not making snack, campers are allowed to taste their creations during the class.
- Distribute recipe books to each camper on their last day of camp to take home.
- Distribute recipe forms on the last day for each camper to submit a recipe for publication in the camp recipe book for the following year.

Benefits of Cooking Class
- A full fledged kitchen set-up would be ideal, but in the real world, portable kitchen equipment is a workable solution for offering interactive cooking classes.
- Cooking classes are a vibrant teaching tool for people with diabetes and anyone looking to eat healthier; they offer a supportive peer environment and many opportunities for “teachable moments”.
- Nutrition goals for people with diabetes can be demonstrated through the use of food and cooking methods.
- New foods and recipes and new methods for cooking old favorites have more impact when taste tested in a group, and when prepared through “hands-on” experience.
- Anecdotal feedback from adult participants suggests that class comradeship and interaction were the best features of the class.
- “Repeat” customers for the regular quarterly cooking classes are the rule not the exception. Participants are initially invited after attending the diabetes education classes at the Nebraska Diabetes Center. In addition to coming back for more cooking classes, many bring family members, neighbors, and friends along with them.
- “Healthy Cooking” demonstrations are offered in a variety of other venues to as few as 4-6 people and as many as 200 people.

RESULTS
More significant than formal written evaluations, which are positive, is the evidence that participants consistently come to subsequent classes and bring family members, friends, and neighbors with them. Children with diabetes, who attend summer camp, regularly rate the cooking classes as one of their favorite activities.

CONCLUSION
Promoting healthy eating in a hands-on, interactive format is an effective means of education and can be adapted to a variety of audiences and community settings.