Korean church-goers enjoy healthy church meals

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

You can help increase access to healthy foods in your community to support healthy hearts and a healthy community. Find out whether healthy foods, like fresh fruits and vegetables, whole-grains, and low-sodium products are available where you live, work, play, and worship and form or join a local coalition to encourage stores, restaurants, and faith-based organizations to ensure that healthy food options are available.

"Our congregation started REACH FAR with KCS and changed white rice to brown rice. Our members are happy with tastier and healthier meals. I'm supportive and thankful the program is influencing health conditions among our church members."

- Pastor Young Chang Kim

SUMMARY

Thanks to the collaboration of church pastors, church kitchen staff, youth groups, and the dedication, motivation, and flexibility of staff at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan NY, 1,500 congregants in 3 churches now have access to healthy choices when eating communal meals at church services. Church leaders have already noticed an increased interest in the healthy options. A follow-up nutrition survey of congregants is expected to show increased consumption of healthy foods during church meals compared to baseline levels.

CHALLENGE

High blood pressure increases the risk of heart attack and stroke and is the cause of 10 million deaths every year. It also disproportionately affects certain ethnic groups, including Korean Americans, who are one of the fastest growing Asian sub groups in the US. Recent research indicates that 1 in 5 Korean Americans have high blood pressure. Called the "silent killer" because it most often does not have symptoms, high blood pressure is also the most important preventable risk factor for premature death worldwide. Key prevention recommendations include ensuring a diet rich in vegetables and low in sodium. Changing individual behaviors and eating healthy foods can be difficult however, if healthy foods are not available in the communities where we live, work, play, and worship. There is a need to increase access to healthy foods for Korean Americans in community settings to address hypertension.

Success Stories

http://nccd.cdc.gov/dchsucce

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SOLUTION

With support from a CDC Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) grant, the Korean Community Services of Metropolitan NY (KCS) and the NYU Center for the Study of Asian American Health established the REACH FAR coalition along with other academic, community, government, and business partners in New York and New Jersey. Beginning work in September 2014, KCS and its partners have successfully implemented a healthy nutrition policy in three Korean churches in New Jersey. A baseline survey of over 400 members across the 3 churches indicate that over 40% of congregants reported that their church did not serve healthy options.

SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

The initiative’s goal is to implement similar nutrition polices in Korean supermarkets over the next 2 years, reaching an additional 39,000 Koreans. Implementation of strategies has begun and includes pricing incentives such as coupons for healthy foods; placement of healthy products at eye-level and near the front of the store; and increased labeling and promotion of healthy foods. Leveraging previous REACH work, KCS has established strong partnerships with several local Korean supermarkets, including H&Y Mart - one of the biggest Korean supermarkets in New Jersey - to create a healthy multi-grain rice recipe that is already sold at a discount to customers and includes the KCS logo with slogan "Eat Healthy, Stay Young!"

RESULTS

With overwhelming support from church leaders and congregants, the policy change required that each of the three churches provide one or more of the following options at each communal meal: at least one whole-grain option; at least one low-fat or non-fat dairy option; at least one fresh fruit option; and/or at least one leafy green salad or fresh vegetable. Together the healthy food options have reached a total of 1,500 congregants. KCS and church partners also helped establish excitement and support for the new policy and healthy food options through healthy recipe contests and sampling events, educational posters, healthy recipe booklets, and hypertension awareness workshops. When asked about the new policy, one church member said, “For the church overall, it was great that kitchen staff are committed to providing a lunch full of fresh vegetables.”