

## PROMOTION OF HEALTHY EATING AMONG HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN PRIMARY CARE

*Promoção da alimentação saudável entre profissionais de saúde na atenção primária*

*Promoción de alimentación saludable entre profesionales sanitarios de la atención primaria*

Description or evaluation of experiences

### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To report the experience of implementing educational activities regarding healthy eating among health professionals in the Family Health Strategy. **Data synthesis:** In loco training was provided for 50 Family Health Strategy teams in the period from December 2014 to March 2015. There was the participation of health professionals such as doctors, nurses, nursing technicians, dentists and community health workers who were participants in the project of Health Promoting Units, in the city of Montes Claros, MG. Four workshops were held, with average duration of 50 minutes each. In the workshops, dynamic activities were developed covering healthy eating habits, anthropometric measurements, body mass index, food consumption, analysis of food labels, and discussion about the activities performed aimed at motivation and attention towards the population's health promotion, stimulating food and nutrition education for the development of healthy eating habits. **Conclusion:** The experience of implementing educational actions on healthy eating made it possible to construct new concepts on the subject among health professionals in the Family Health Strategy. Thus, the workshops on healthy eating can be a tool to change the reality of practices in food and nutrition of these professionals in their territory of action. Training the health professionals will benefit the population by strengthening the actions of health promotion and awareness for prevention of health conditions related to poor diet in primary health care.

**Descriptors:** Feeding; Health Promotion; Food Habits.

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Relatar a experiência da implantação de ações educativas sobre alimentação saudável entre profissionais de saúde na Estratégia Saúde da Família. **Síntese dos dados:** Foram aplicadas capacitações in loco em 50 equipes de Estratégia Saúde da Família, no período de dezembro de 2014 a março de 2015. Houve a participação de profissionais de saúde, como médicos, enfermeiros, técnicos de enfermagem, dentistas e agentes comunitários de saúde, participantes do projeto das Unidades Promotoras da Saúde, na cidade de Montes Claros, MG. Foram realizadas 4 oficinas, com duração média de 50 minutos cada. Nas oficinas, foram desenvolvidas atividades dinâmicas sobre hábitos alimentares saudáveis, avaliação antropométrica, índice de massa corporal, consumo alimentar, análise de rótulos dos alimentos e discussão sobre as atividades exercidas visando à motivação e atenção voltada à promoção da saúde da população, incentivando a educação alimentar e nutricional para a formação de hábitos alimentares saudáveis. **Conclusão:** A experiência de implantação de ações educativas sobre alimentação saudável possibilitou a construção de novos conceitos sobre o tema entre os profissionais de saúde na Estratégia Saúde da Família. Dessa forma, as oficinas em alimentação saudável podem ser uma ferramenta para mudança da realidade de práticas em alimentação e nutrição desses profissionais no seu território de atuação. A capacitação dos profissionais de saúde beneficiará a população ao potencializar as ações de promoção de saúde e de conscientização para prevenção dos agravos à saúde relacionados à má alimentação na atenção básica.

**Descritores:** Alimentação; Promoção da Saúde; Hábitos Alimentares.

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## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** *Relatar la experiencia de la implantación de acciones educativas sobre la alimentación saludable entre profesionales sanitarios de la Estrategia Salud de la Familia. Síntesis de los datos:* *Se realizaron formaciones in loco en 50 equipos de Estrategia Salud de la Familia entre diciembre de 2014 y marzo de 2015. Hubo la participación de profesionales sanitarios como médicos, enfermeros, técnicos de enfermería, dentistas y agentes comunitarios de salud que eran participantes del proyecto de las Unidades Promotoras de Salud en la ciudad de Montes Claros, MG. Se realizaron 4 talleres con una media de duración de 50 minutos cada uno. En los talleres se desarrollaron actividades dinámicas sobre los hábitos alimentarios saludables, la evaluación antropométrica, el índice de masa corporal, el consumo alimentario, el análisis de los rótulos de los alimentos y discusión sobre las actividades ejecutadas objetivando la motivación y la atención direccionada a la promoción de la salud de la población con incentivo a la educación alimentaria y nutricional para la formación de hábitos alimentarios saludables. Conclusión:* *La experiencia de implantación de acciones educativas sobre la alimentación saludable posibilitó la construcción de nuevos conceptos sobre el tema entre los profesionales sanitarios de la Estrategia Salud de la Familia. Así, los talleres de alimentación saludable pueden ser una herramienta para cambios en las prácticas de alimentación y nutrición de esos profesionales en su territorio de actuación. La formación de los profesionales sanitarios ofrecerá beneficios a la población por potenciar las acciones de promoción de salud y de concienciación para la prevención de los agravios a la salud relacionados a la mala alimentación de la atención básica.*

**Descriptor:** *Alimentación; Promoción de la Salud; Hábitos Alimenticios.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Family Health Strategy (FHS) is defined as the gateway of the health system in Brazil<sup>(1)</sup>. Moreover, it adapts positive changes that benefit the life of the population, thus performing actions with professionalism and responsibility in order to build the necessary aspects for the improvement of the health of the population, attributing a differentiated view of nutritional care throughout life, like the knowledge and pleasure in the consumption of healthy foods<sup>(1,2)</sup>.

The promotion of healthy eating is essential for the awareness of health professionals, since it is directed towards the preventive strengthening of pathologies, with a focus on the accomplishment of health promotion and covering all classes, regardless of age, sex, ethnicity etc. It represents a potential tool for the achievement of a healthy life structure<sup>(3)</sup>.

Food and nutrition actions in basic health care can contribute either to the qualification and to the guarantee of integral health care provided to the Brazilian population<sup>(4)</sup>. Based on this premise, it is important to encourage the FHS professionals to work with themes of this nature in their practice.

The health professional, during his practice in health education actions, must be innovative, promoting educational actions that seek to make the subject reflect and transform their previous practices, so that they understand that the incorporation of such actions into his daily life may lead to further benefits to their health, by favoring disease prevention and promoting healthy lifestyles<sup>(5)</sup>.

Nevertheless, one must take into account the environment in which the individual is inserted because, in this interaction, there will be a mutual awareness that will result in growth and autonomy<sup>(6)</sup>. Through the awareness of the health professional and the patient, there will be a change in their lifestyle, resulting in quality and prevention of pathologies<sup>(5)</sup>.

In this sense, it becomes necessary the use of strategies to promote effective learning, based on reflective, dialogic, contextual, collaborative and constructive thinking<sup>(7,8)</sup>. Moreover, it is important to emphasize that the interest, commitment and effort of the health professionals in acquiring knowledge contribute to the transformation of their professional practice and consequently impact on the care they provide<sup>(9)</sup>.

Appropriate diet has been gradually introduced in health promotion actions, mainly based on the individual's awareness. The professional nutritionist acts with the aim of promoting dietary habits in the development of a healthy lifestyle in the population, so as to contribute to the guarantee of the quality of life<sup>(10)</sup>.

In primary care, guidance for healthy eating is still a challenge and, which reinforces the need for greater efforts to expand its supply<sup>(4,11)</sup>. Therefore, in the present study, the objective was to report the experience of implementing educational actions on healthy eating among health professionals in the Family Health Strategy.

## DATA SYNTHESIS

This is the report of an experience carried out with 50 Family Health Strategy (FHS) teams taking part of the Health Promoting Units project in the city of Montes Claros, MG, from December 2014 to March 2015. Participated in the experience the health professionals enrolled in the FHS teams, such as doctors, nurses, nursing technicians, dentists and community health agents, who accepted the invitation.

Since the FHS professionals are the link between the health system and the population, the work was carried out through workshops with discussion groups, debates, group dynamics and practical activities in order to apply educational actions on healthy eating among health professionals, thus leading to verification directed at food and nutrition education for the formation of good eating habits.

The educational activity consisted of four workshops, often weekly and lasting 50 minutes each, conducted by duly trained nutrition professionals. The workshops were conducted at the FHS unit, with the voluntary participation of approximately 15 professionals per team. The number

of participants varied in each FHS team considering their availability. In the workshops, themes related to food, nutrition and health were addressed in an environment that allowed the socialization and exchange of experience among the participants. Critical thinking was stimulated in the construction of knowledge, in order to ensure the empowerment of the subject. Chart I displays a description of the workshops.

In the first workshop, the daily eating habits of the participants were discussed with them. The usual Brazilian diet is influenced by several factors and, currently, it is characterized by a “traditional” consumption pattern (based

Chart I - Description of the Workshops conducted with the health professionals. Montes Claros, MG, 2014-2015.

Workshop	Theme	Objective	Content	Achievements
Workshop 01	Eating habits	Discuss the eating habits of the population	Food guide for the Brazilian population	Collective reflection on the importance of adopting healthy eating habits.
Workshop 02	Food and Health	To evaluate the nutritional status and the relationship with food consumption	Nutrition assessment	Collective reflection by the participants on the impact of food consumption on health.
Workshop 03	What am I eating?	Analyze food labels	Nutritional labelling	Collective reflection by the participants on the quality of food consumed.
Workshop 04	Planning of food actions and commitment to change	Implement the practice of healthy eating	Motivational	Collective reflection by the participants on the daily strategies for the consumption of a healthy diet.

#### Workshop 1 - Eating habits

on rice and beans) associated with foods classified as ultra-processed, with high contents of fat, sodium, sugar, and calories, and a low micronutrient content. The average consumption of fruits and vegetables still does not meet the recommendations of the Food Guide for the Brazilian Population, while ultra-processed foods such as sweets and soft drinks have their consumption increased each year<sup>(12)</sup>.

The dynamics performed in Workshop 1, based on the Food Guide for the Brazilian Population, evaluated the participants' perception of what a healthy meal would be like. Each participant drew their usual meal on the figure of a plate.

After discussion and evaluation of the eating habits of the participants, the folder “10 steps for a healthy diet”, prepared by the Ministry of Health, was distributed. This

material guided the new discussion in the group about healthy eating and ways to maintain/achieve a better quality of life<sup>(13)</sup>.

Healthy diet and proper eating habits are indispensable factors in the protection against chronic diseases and in the achievement and maintenance of a good quality of life. Therefore, changing eating habits is imperative for the individual's health and well-being<sup>(14)</sup>.

In the promotion of a healthy diet in the spaces of action, the professional must have a theoretical basis on this subject. In a study carried out among education professionals, who are partners of the primary care in the same municipality, a limitation of knowledge about the theme was observed, and they also reported lacking some specific training on Healthy Eating<sup>(15)</sup>. In this sense, it is

important that, among the contingent of professionals who work in primary care, initiatives such as the one presented in the study be carried out, so that they can acquire specific knowledge and ensure success in actions promoting healthy eating in the territory.

### **Workshop 2 - Food and health**

Diet is far beyond nutrition, once the foods are prepared and combined with each other. In addition, the act of eating is influenced by the habits and customs of the individual, which generates a direct influence on their health and well-being. Based on this premise, the second workshop highlighted the importance of healthy eating by relating daily food intake and nutritional status<sup>(14)</sup>.

It is estimated that 70% of deaths in the adult population in Brazil occur due to chronic noncommunicable diseases. It is known, however, that the diet has a great influence on the development or not of these conditions<sup>(1)</sup>.

To relate food and health, the participants' eating habits (fruit and vegetable intake, water consumption and interval between meals) were analyzed.

Then, based on the individual's anthropometric evaluation, nutritional counseling was carried out based on their condition, imminent risks, when applicable, and preventive measures against associated pathologies.

### **Workshop 3 - What am I consuming?**

Workshop 3 consisted of a review of the previous meetings and a reflection on the food change of the participants throughout the interventions. Additionally, in this workshop, the participants discussed food labels, currently considered a communication tool between food producing companies and consumers, with the aim of informing them about the foods purchased.

Regulations on nutritional labelling are seen as important health promotion activities. The consumers has a right to access information on the characteristics and nutritional composition of the food they purchase in the trade, that is, its nutritional properties, to meet their food requirements. Food labelling, by guiding the consumer on the quality and quantity of the nutritional components of the products, can promote appropriate food choices, but the continuing implementation of interventions in the context of health promotion is essential<sup>(16)</sup>.

Thus, in this workshop, the evaluation of food labels, previously requested to the participants, was carried out in order to detect the presence of substances causing pathologies associated with excessive consumption. Based on the labels, doubts related to the nomenclature, substances

and quantities found on food labels were clarified, ending with a discussion of preventive approach, addressing slips and relapses during the attempt to implement healthy diets.

### **Workshop 4 - Planning of food actions and commitment to change**

The main objective of Workshop 4 was to recapitulate all previous activities and to implement strategies in the daily life for the adoption of healthy eating habits, in addition to emphasize the importance of the motivation for the accomplishment of changes in the diet. The participants watched an educational video, intended to motivate the practice of healthy eating habits.

Nutrition education is one of the indispensable actions in care related to diet and nutrition in Primary Care, and involves the promotion of adequate and healthy food practices. These actions should prioritize the development of skills and competences that generate empowerment and autonomy in individuals, families and communities, considering approaches that take into account the specificities of the life cycle<sup>(17)</sup>.

The evaluation of the learning was conducted individually, by means of questions addressing all the activities carried out, and each professional had a moment to clarify possible doubts.

As a workshop closing activity, a collective snack was offered, in which each participant shared a healthy food of his or her own choice. The purpose of this snack was to promote confraternization and demonstrate the feasibility of the healthy eating practice in their social context.

In primary health care, guidance on healthy eating is not universal and there is inequity, making clear the need for greater efforts to expand supply. The promotion of adequate and healthy food practices, recommended by health policies and programs, has not yet effectively reached the system user in Primary Health Care<sup>(18)</sup>.

In this sense, the nutritional intervention, based on workshops, can be considered a potential tool among health professionals for acquisition of information on nutrition and change of eating habits. The educational actions impact on a conscious practice of behaviors for health promotion and favor a healthy life<sup>(19)</sup>.

Furthermore, the implementation of workshops in a permanent education perspective has been evidenced as a space for reflection, integration and construction of ideas for the practice. The spaces of Permanent Education should be built with professionals to support and encourage the actions of healthy eating promotion in the territory of action<sup>(20)</sup>.

This study respected the ethical precepts and was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the institution seat of the research under opinion no. 1,145,637/2015.

## CONCLUSION

The experience of implementing educational actions on healthy eating made it possible to construct new concepts on the theme among the health professionals in the Family Health Strategy. Thus, the workshops on healthy eating can represent a tool to change the reality of practices in food and nutrition of these professionals in their territory of action. The training of health professionals will benefit the population by enhancing the actions of health promotion and awareness to prevent health issues related to poor diet in basic care.

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