



CAN-Act

The California Association of Nutrition and Activity Programs

## Shaping Healthy Environments through Nutrition Education

What influences the food choices of low income families, and how can nutrition education be employed to influence people to make healthy food choices<sup>1</sup>? The chart below describes many of the factors that influence food choices and the best educational strategies for influencing those factors in order to change dietary practices.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Nutrition Education (SNAP-Ed) efforts are more likely to achieve the USDA's goal of improving the likelihood that persons eligible for SNAP will make healthy food choices within a limited budget if they are allowed to engage in all of these nutrition education strategies.

### Influence

#### **Knowledge, awareness**

Understanding the relationship between diet and health; understanding the information on food labels, knowledge of how to maximize food dollars, etc.

#### **Skills and abilities**

Ability to prepare food in healthful ways and in ways that make them appealing; skills to select a healthy diet; skills to keep food safe to eat

#### **Preferences**

Appreciating the way healthy foods taste; exposure to healthful foods often to influence food preferences

#### **Self efficacy**

Confidence in one's ability to make healthy food choices

#### **Availability, accessibility**

Healthy foods can be readily obtained without significant inconvenience; nutrient dense foods are as readily available as low nutrient foods; culturally acceptable healthy food choices are readily available

#### **Social norms**

Healthy eating is the usual practice among most people; healthy eating messages are as frequent as messages about unhealthy eating, people feel supported in choosing a healthy diet

### Best nutrition education strategy

Traditional education such as one-to-one counseling, small or large group classes, written materials

Traditional education such as nutrition or cooking classes, cooking demonstrations, grocery store tours

Traditional education such as cooking demonstrations, taste testing, and food sampling

Traditional education such as classes with "hands on" components, social marketing campaigns

Environmental strategies such as neighborhood market consultation, development of food buying co-ops, implementation of "farm to school" models, technical assistance to farmers' markets around accepting EBT purchases

Social marketing strategies such as the successful "1% or Less" and "5-a-Day" campaigns, social support strategies such as the adoption of a "healthy potluck" policy by a faith or social group

<sup>1</sup> USDA, 1997. "Understanding the Food Choices of Low Income Families"