



Words About Wellness

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More than cooking, Teaching Kitchens are learning labs for life skills

With dramatic increases in obesity and diabetes, the search is on for innovative strategies to change the paths of those living with, or at risk for developing these and other lifestyle-related chronic diseases. In conjunction with good medical guidance, holistic strategies are needed that will improve the way people eat, move, and think.

Dr. David Eisenberg, Director of Culinary Nutrition at Harvard Chan's [Department of Nutrition](#), may have tapped into one winning strategy with [Teaching Kitchens](#)—a kind of cooking laboratory that combines culinary instruction using healthful whole ingredients, nutrition education, exercise, mindfulness, and personalized health coaching.

A study by Eisenberg and colleagues, published in the [American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine](#) in 2017, assessed the implementation of the Teaching Kitchen concept in a workplace setting. The curriculum used in the study was based on [Healthy Kitchens, Healthy Lives \(HKHL\)](#), an annual educational conference offered by the Harvard Chan School of Public Health and the Culinary Institute of America (CIA). Two cohorts of 20 participants each were enrolled in the intervention for 14 or 16 weeks. Participants participated in culinary demonstrations, hands-on culinary lessons, and interactive lectures with discussion on nutrition, mindfulness, and movement. There were no restrictions on amount of food eaten. Participants also received access to a local gym and a personal activity-tracking device to increase their physical activity, and were matched with a professional health coach who provided 30-minute phone calls once a week throughout the duration of the study.



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Compared with baseline measures, at the completion of the intervention there were statistically significant decreases in body weight, body mass index, waist circumference, systolic and diastolic blood pressure, and total cholesterol in both cohorts. These changes persisted at one-year follow-up, though only statistically significant decreases remained for waist circumference and diastolic blood pressure. Positive behavior changes were also observed, such as cooking meals from scratch at home more often, relying on ready-made meals less often, reading nutrition labels on purchased foods more often, and feeling more confident in cooking.

Reproducibility, scalability, and evaluation of Teaching Kitchen curricula will be explored by the *Teaching Kitchen Collaborative* (TKC)—a network of over 30 organizations with existing or planned teaching kitchens (details about the TKC and its current members can be found at: <http://www.tkcollaborative.org/>). The TKC was launched by Dr. Eisenberg and colleagues at the CIA and Harvard Chan's Department of Nutrition in 2016.



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Eisenberg, D.M., Righter, A.C., Matthews, B., Zhang, W., Willett, W.C, Massa, J. Feasibility Pilot Study of a Teaching Kitchen and Self-Care Curriculum in a Workplace Setting. *Am J Lifestyle Med.* 2017, May 23. First Published Online. DOI: 10.1177/1559827617709757.