



community
food and health
(scotland)

Getting the messages:

What is the impact of basic accredited nutrition courses on food and health work?



About CFHS



Community Food and Health (Scotland) aims to ensure that everyone in Scotland has the opportunity, ability and confidence to access a healthy and acceptable diet for themselves, their families and their communities. We do this by supporting work with and within low-income communities that addresses health inequalities and barriers to healthy and affordable food.

Barriers being addresses by community-based initiatives are:

Availability – increasing access to fruit and vegetables of an acceptable quality and cost

Affordability – tackling not only the cost of shopping but also getting to the shops

Skills – improving confidence and skills in cooking and shopping

Culture – overcoming ingrained habits

Through our work we aim to support communities to

- Identify barriers to a healthy balanced diet
- Develop local responses to addressing these barriers, and
- Highlight where actions at other levels, or in other sectors are required.

We value the experience, understanding, skills and knowledge within Scotland's community food initiatives and their unique contribution to developing and delivering policy and practice at all levels.

From 1 April 2013 CFHS will become part of NHS Health Scotland, a Special Health Board with a national remit to reduce health inequalities.



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Who this is for and what it is about

This report is based on the results of an online survey¹ completed by 35 people that had completed an accredited nutrition course. They were all involved with community initiatives where they could potentially improve food activities, including the provision of meals, as well as teaching practical food skills. This report shows what difference attending a credible nutrition course has made to their skills and confidence to provide or promote healthy balanced diets.

It will be useful to anyone involved in setting up or developing community food activities and who is considering how to ensure that consistent and credible nutrition messages are part of this work.

1 NHS Borders distributed paper copies of the survey to people that had completed a REHIS course with them.

Promoting consistent nutrition messages

The Scottish Government aims to tackle health inequalities and actions to address these are embedded within a range of Scottish policies. Food and its link with health are clearly made within two current policies: Improving Maternal and Infant Nutrition: A Framework for Action (2011) and the Preventing Obesity Route Map (2010) and its Action Plan (2011). Both aim to improve nutrition and prevent obesity in Scotland. The Maternal and Infant Nutrition Framework highlights the need to promote healthy eating for families. It particularly emphasises the need for appropriate advice to be given to women, before, during and after pregnancy. It also suggests that information should be available to tackle myths and misinformation about maternal and infant nutrition. The Route Map Action Plan states that it is important for people to understand not just about a healthy balanced diet, but to also understand more about portion sizes and calories in order to avoid overweight and obesity.

In 2011, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) commissioned research to explore consumers' and health professionals' understanding about healthy eating, particularly in relation to starchy foods and foods high in fat and/or sugar. There was a consensus amongst both groups that 'everybody knows' that consumption of foods high in fat and/or sugar should be limited. However, there was mixed awareness of how much starchy food should be consumed. Consumers tended to underestimate the amount of starchy foods recommended as part of a healthy balanced diet and were reluctant to eat more, due to the misconception that starchy foods are fattening. Other misconceptions included the belief that low-fat foods are automatically 'healthy' and consumers overestimated the amount of foods high in fat or sugar that would meet the definition of a healthy balanced diet. The researchers suggested that one barrier to the uptake of a healthy balanced diet was the mixed messages that are often available to consumers; sometimes exacerbated by media stories. These messages can lead to a distrust of nutrition information.



Nutrition courses in Scotland

There are a small range of basic accredited nutrition courses that are available in Scotland. In 2006, the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland (REHIS) worked with several national agencies to develop a six-hour basic nutrition course that is now delivered by trainers across Scotland. Over 10,000 people have completed this course which is open to anyone. In 2011, REHIS again worked with partners to develop a nine-hour course tailored for carers of adults with a learning disability. Both courses aim to provide an introduction to food and its link with health.

The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) is a UK charity that provides and accredits a wide range of vocational qualifications, including several on nutrition. These vary in duration, from one day to eight to ten days (see Appendix One for more information).

Community Food and Health (Scotland) or CFHS, was one of the partners involved in putting the REHIS nutrition courses together and since then, has promoted these to staff and volunteers working in the community. The promotion has included a range of targeted funding programmes aimed to increase the reach of these courses into low-income or vulnerable communities. We have aimed to further increase access to these courses by supporting 30 individuals, mainly working with community initiatives, to complete one or more of the RSPH courses. Individuals that have completed the RSPH Diploma course and have suitable training experience or qualifications can register as a REHIS Elementary Food and Health course trainer. This further enhances the availability of basic nutrition training by increasing the number of trainers able to provide the course within their organisations or to generate income by providing it to others.



Finding out what difference these courses made

Earlier this year, CFHS conducted an online survey in order to find out the impact of the nutrition courses. Those completing the survey were expected to work or volunteer within a community group, voluntary organisation, social enterprise or to support these groups. They were expected to have completed one or more of five accredited nutrition course in the last two years. The 35 individuals who took part in the survey had completed one or more of the following qualifications:

- REHIS Elementary Food and Health course - 19 people
- REHIS Elementary Food and Health for carers of adults with a learning disability course - two people
- The Royal Society for Public Health Certificate in Nutrition and Health - five people
- Level 3 Award in Nutrition for Healthier Food and Special Diets - two people
- The Royal Society for Public Health Diploma in Nutrition and Health - seven people

We have analysed the information from the survey based on the highest level of qualification that the participant had completed.

Who responded to the survey?

Survey participants had completed courses that took place across eight of the 14 NHS Board areas. The REHIS courses are available across Scotland, and all of the courses are delivered to a wide range of participants and organisations. Our small sample might not be representative of these other groups.

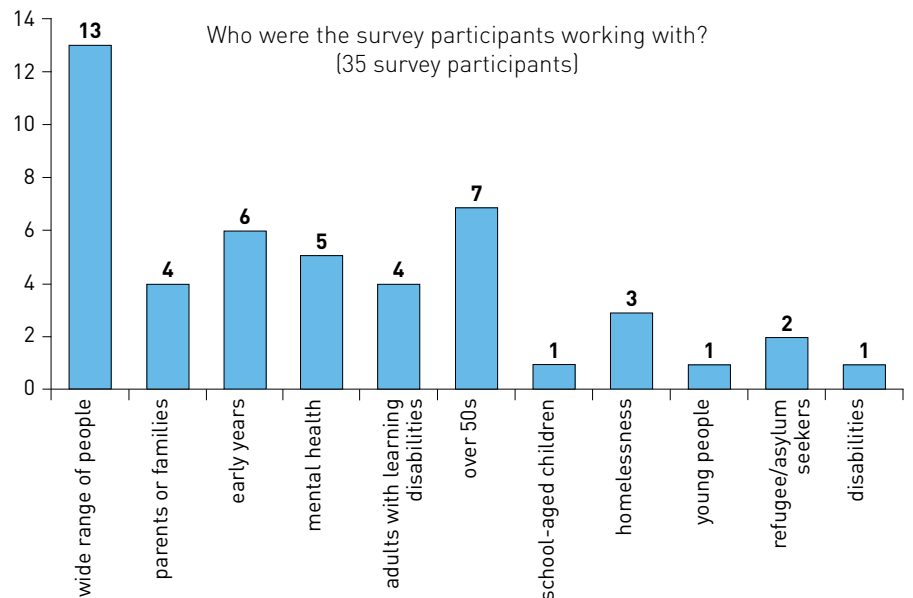
Almost two thirds of the people that responded to the survey said they worked or volunteered with a national, regional or local community or voluntary organisation. The others mainly worked with local authorities or NHS Boards. Three were volunteers and the remainder were employed.

Participants were asked to provide information about how many people benefited from their activities each month. Around two thirds reported working with fewer than 50 people each month and about a third reported that they worked with more than 50 people each month.



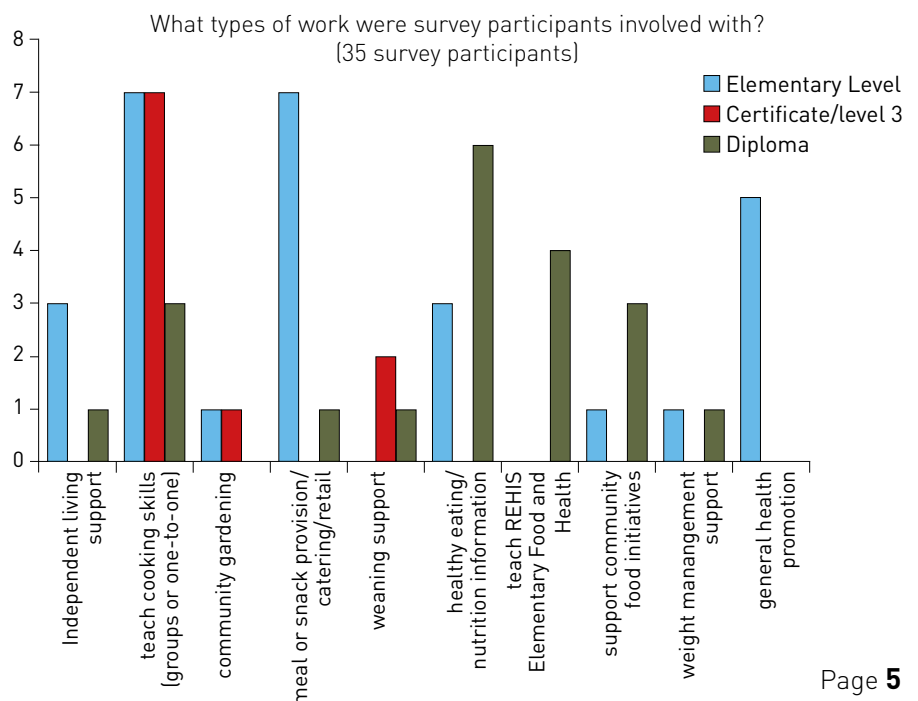
Who do they pass on nutrition messages to?

All 35 participants gave information about the sectors they worked in or who they might influence with messages about nutrition. Many were working with more than one target group. Chart 1 shows the range of people they worked with.



What work do they do?

Chart 2 shows the type of work that participants said they were involved with at the time of the survey. Most were working with food directly, including those supporting people to live independently - by assisting with shopping and cooking, others taught cooking skills or provided meals or food in supported accommodation projects or lunch clubs. Participants that had completed the Diploma were more likely to be involved with providing developmental support or training to community initiatives and working across regional areas.



Did the nutrition courses improve their work?

Thirty out of the 35 participants agreed that they had been able to make use of what they had learned on the course. Most of these indicated in an open-ended question that the nutrition course had been beneficial to them by making comments such as 'increased knowledge', 'more awareness' and 'more confidence' about their ability to provide information about food and health.

The picture below represents the nutrition messages that participants most remembered from the courses and that were useful in their work. As the picture shows, two of the most useful types of information were the Food Standards Agency eatwell plate and issues around weight management, energy balance or calories (each highlighted by 11 participants).

The eatwell plate is a teaching tool that forms the basis of training within the REHIS nutrition courses, and is included within the others. Participants explained how they had used the eatwell plate and other ideas to assist them with their work:

"The eatwell plate - I use it in every group I work with."
REHIS course participant.

"We have looked at drinks and how much sugar is in them.....visually with sugar cubes in a bag ..."
REHIS course participant.

Although six people mentioned that they worked with early years target groups, only three said they learned about nutrition relating to pregnancy or early years. Although most people gave information that indicated that the courses had increased their knowledge or confidence in some ways, it is difficult to conclude *how much* they have learned as we have no baseline information. Four participants gave an indication of how much they had gained from completing one of the REHIS courses:

"I found the Elementary Food and Health course which I attended last year to be more helpful and informative than I had expected and would recommend others to attend."
REHIS and Diploma course participant.



"It was an absolute eye-opener..."

REHIS course participant.

"I had expected more from the course than I got from it. I already had a good grounding as far as healthy eating is concerned."

REHIS course participant.

"(I) already knew a bit, but it was a very intensive, comprehensive course."

REHIS course participant.

Most participants were already involved in food activities prior to taking part in the nutrition courses and indicated that these had improved their work. Five had developed new activities, such as new cooking groups or training, or delivering presentations to other staff about nutrition. Three other participants involved in food provision reported that they had returned to their workplaces and improved menus. Four Diploma participants said that they were delivering the REHIS Elementary Food and Health course.

Participants were asked an open-ended question about what three pieces of information they remembered the most and that had been useful for themselves and their families. On the whole, participants reported that information that had been useful for their work was also useful for them. A handful of people reported changes that they had made to their own diets or families

as the result of the courses. These included: adding more vegetables to meals and drinking more water.

Does the level of qualification make any difference?

Participants completing the Diploma or the Certificate/ Level 3 qualifications, particularly the Diploma level, remembered information from the course that reflected the deeper level of learning on these courses. They mentioned information such as amino acids, antioxidants or that the course reinforced the main messages, but in more detail.

What barriers or challenges have they had to face to using the information?

Five groups reported that they had been unable to use what they had learned on the courses in their work. The main challenges they faced were a lack of funding or the facilities required for delivering teaching activities such as cooking. Some said they had not had enough time to plan activities. One participant that had successfully undertaken activities with mental health support service users needed to convince their manager of the importance of this type of work first.



What information about nutrition were participants using after the courses?

Participants on all the nutrition courses were required to complete assessments and exams to show that they had acquired a level of nutrition knowledge. However an important outcome of the courses is the information about further, credible sources of nutritional information. This is useful for participants to refer to and to easily pass on information to others.

Thirty-five participants reported if they had already used, would consider using, or would be unlikely to use the following sources of information:

- **Materials provided as part of the nutrition course** - 23 people had already used these and nearly all the others would consider using these.
- **The Food Standards Agency 'Eatwell website'** - 26 people had already used this and nearly all the others would consider using it.
- **The British Dietetic Association website** - nine people had used this and all the others said they would consider using it.
- **The Scottish Government's Take Life on campaign** - five people had already used this and the others would consider using it.

Participants reported on other sources of information on nutrition that they considered to be credible. Twenty-six other sources were mentioned, half of these were NHS materials, websites, or advice from NHS staff. Three of these reported that they had used NHS materials on weaning, nutrition and pregnancy and feeding toddlers. Other websites that participants had used included the British Heart Foundation and the British Nutrition Foundation. Nearly all the sources mentioned would provide accurate information about nutrition. There was only website mentioned that would not provide adequate information - and the participant reported using this alongside other websites.

Conclusion

Our online survey shows that those working in communities have gained knowledge and confidence from the courses to support their work to promote consistent nutrition messages. Participants indicated that they had remembered and used key nutrition messages and knew where to find further accurate and credible information. Around a third had found information about energy balance or weight management particularly useful. Cascading this knowledge meets actions within the Route Map Action Plan to ensure that information about portion sizes and energy balance are promoted as well as healthy eating.

Some of those working in the early years sector indicated that they had learned information or knew where to find it - helping them to address concerns about the nutrition of pregnant women or families with young children as highlighted in the Maternal and Infant Nutrition Framework. Participants' frequent mention of the FSA eatwell plate should go some way to address concerns found by the FSA research that consumers are not always aware of the amounts of starchy foods required for a healthy diet; the eatwell plate provides a visual tool that shows the balance of foods, including starchy foods that are recommended as part of a balanced diet.

"[The course] has given us the backbone to our lunch club services."

REHIS course participant.

Acknowledgements

CFHS would like to thank everyone that took part in the survey. We would specially like to thank: Jane Bunting and Graham Walker at REHIS, and Anila Chughtai, NHS Borders.

References

Information about policies is available on the Scottish Government website:

Preventing Overweight and Obesity in Scotland: A Route Map Towards Healthy Weight (2010) and the Prevention of Obesity Route Map Action Plan (2011)

Improving Maternal and Infant Nutrition: A Framework for Action (2011)

www.scotland.gov.uk

Information about the Food Standards Agency eatwell plate

www.eatwellscotland.org

Chan, V. Et al, Ipsos Mori (Scotland) (2012). Food Standards Agency in Scotland Research Report: Investigating how both consumers and health professionals understand healthy eating messages. Available from: www.foodbase.org.uk//admintools/reportdocuments/753-1-1294_FS244029_1_Ipsos-_FINAL.pdf [accessed online 7 March 2013]

The Food Standards Agency's 'eatwell' website:

www.eatwellscotland.org

The British Dietetic Association website:

www.bda.uk.com

The Scottish Government's Take Life on website:

www.takelifeon.co.uk



Appendix One

Information about the nutrition courses:

REHIS Elementary Food and Health course

Those completing this course will gain an understanding of: an introduction to food and health, the function of food, energy measures and influences on food intake, eating for health – food and wellbeing, and putting it all together - action planning.

REHIS Elementary Food and Health for carers of adults with a learning disability course

Key learning outcomes include: introduction to food and health, eating for health and wellbeing, understanding energy balance, health issues in people with learning disabilities, and menu planning.

More information about these courses, including information about trainers, is available on the REHIS website.

www.rehis.org.uk

The Royal Society for Public Health Certificate in Nutrition and Health (now called Level 3)

Those completing this course will gain an understanding of: the factors affecting food intake and choice, sources and functions of nutrients, nutritional requirements of different groups, the development of disease, changes in the food and catering industries affecting the British diets and the promotion of healthy eating.

Level 3 Award in Nutrition for Healthier Food and Special Diets

Those completing this course will gain an understanding of the importance of balanced diets, the nutrient composition of food, nutritional needs of individuals and the preparation, presentation and promotion of healthy meals and diets.

The Royal Society for Public Health Diploma in Nutrition and Health (now called Level 4)

Holders of this qualification will have a good knowledge and understanding of the principles of good nutrition and healthy eating and to ensure they are able to apply these principles in a practical and responsible way in the course of their daily work and lives.

Further information about the Royal Society for Public Health, its qualifications and where they are delivered:

www.rsph.org.uk

Appendix Two

CFHS online training survey

Community Food and Health (Scotland) would like to find out about the impact of accredited nutrition courses on communities in Scotland.



You are welcome to complete this survey if:

1. You work or volunteer within a community group, voluntary organisation, social enterprise or your work involves supporting, or working with these organisations; and
2. You have completed one of the following accredited nutrition course in the last two years:
 - REHIS Elementary Food and Health course (basic nutrition) (please note that this is not the hygiene course)
 - REHIS Elementary Food and Health for carers of adults with a learning disability course (basic nutrition)
 - The Royal Society for Public Health Certificate in Nutrition and Health
 - The Royal Society for Public Health Diploma in Nutrition and Health
 - Level 3 Award in Nutrition for Healthier Food and Special Diets

We will enter surveys completed by Friday 8 February into a prize draw, giving a prize worth £50 to the first three groups that we draw.

This survey will take around 15 minutes to complete.

About your group or agency

1. What is the title of your job or voluntary role?
2. Who do you work or volunteer for? (Please tick)
 - Local community or voluntary organisation
 - Regional or national voluntary organisation
 - Social enterprise
 - NHS Board
 - Local Authority
 - Other, please tell us who you work or volunteer for
3. How many participants regularly benefit directly from your job or voluntary role each month? (Please tick)

<input type="checkbox"/> Between 1 and 10	<input type="checkbox"/> Between 26 and 50
<input type="checkbox"/> Between 11 and 25	<input type="checkbox"/> More than 50
4. Please tell us about any food activities that you currently deliver as part of your job or voluntary role. (This could include for example: selling or providing snacks, meals or food, teaching cooking or gardening skills, assisting participants with food shopping or budgeting, etc)

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.....

5. Please tell us briefly about the participants that benefit from your job or voluntary role

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.....
.....

About the course you completed

6. Which nutrition course did you complete? (Please tick all courses that you have completed)
- REHIS Elementary Food and Health course (basic nutrition)
 - REHIS Elementary Food and Health course for carers of adults with a learning disability (basic nutrition)
 - The Royal Society for Public Health Certificate in Nutrition and Health
 - The Royal Society for Public Health Diploma in Nutrition and Health
 - Level 3 Award in Nutrition for Healthier Food and Special Diets

7. When did you complete the course? (Please provide an approximate date of the most recent course that you completed.)

.....

8. Where did you complete the course? (Please name the town or local authority area where you completed the most recent course.)

.....

Since you have attended the course

9. Tell us about the information or main messages that you remember from the course and that has been useful for:
Yourself (up to three pieces of information):

.....
.....
.....
.....

Your work/voluntary role (up to three pieces of information):

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.....
.....

10. Have you been able to use what you learnt on the course in your work or voluntary role since completing the course?

- Yes Please answer c)
 No Please answer a) and b)

a. If 'No', please tell us about any plans you have to make use of what you learnt on the course in the future.

.....

b. If 'No', please tell us about anything that has been a barrier to you using the information that you have learnt on the course within your work or voluntary role (for example, this might include a lack of facilities, opportunities to pass on the information, or you may need more support from colleagues or other agencies)

.....

c. If 'Yes' Please tell us how you have used what you learnt on the course to develop or improve your food activities

.....

11 Have you used any of the following sources of information about nutrition since attending the course? (please tick)

	Have used already	Would consider using	Probably would not use
Materials provided as part of the nutrition course that you completed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Food standards Agency 'Eatwell website' www.eatwellscotland.org	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The British Dietetic Association website www.bda.uk.com	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Scottish Government's Take life on campaign website www.takelifeon.co.uk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. Please tell us about any other websites, materials or contacts (such as NHS health promotion staff etc) that you have used to receive credible sources of information about nutrition.

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13. Any other comments?

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Contact details (optional)

If you would like to be entered into a free prize draw, please provide your contact details below.

Name

Telephone

Email

We would like to contact a small selection of people to provide us with further information.
Would you be happy for us to contact you about this? (please tick)

Yes No



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