

Hermiston middle schoolers learn basics of cooking, nutrition

Students learn how to make healthy meals, snacks at home

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Making meals is easier than it looks. About 20 Hermiston middle schoolers have spent the last four weeks learning that in the inaugural middle school cooking class at Hermiston High School.

Angie Treadwell, who works with the OSU Extension program, coordinated the class with Hermiston High School teacher Susie Cobb and a few high school students. Students spent the once-per-week class learning about the basics of nutrition, and how to make some simple snacks and meals from scratch.

On the last day of class, students learned about added sugars, looking at the amount of sugar in Dutch Bros. coffee drinks and flavored yogurt. They then learned how to make their own fruit yogurt, using frozen fruit and a little sugar, granola and apple cinnamon muffins.

“You can give them lectures about nutrition, but helping them learn hands-on, through taste and touch, is better,” Treadwell said.

Lidia Ortiz, a seventh grader at Sandstone Middle School, said this was her first time cooking, and she was surprised by some of the things she learned.

“Dutch Bros. (drinks) had more sugar than I expected,” she said.

Ortiz was making apple cinnamon muffins, with some help from Avery Treadwell and Monica Hernandez, the high schoolers who had the idea to start the class.

“I know a lot of younger kids don’t know how to cook meals, so we wanted them to be able to cook healthier meals and snacks,” said Treadwell. She said they taught students how to make cookies, pancakes and muffins, as well as soup, from scratch.

“When they’re at home, they can actually cook something simple and healthy,” Hernandez said.

Cobb, who teaches family and consumer sciences at the high school, said some students come into the class with basic cooking skills, but the majority have no experience.

“They learn how to cook food so they don’t only have to eat out of a box,” she said. “A lot of the time, when you don’t know what you’re eating, you end up eating a pile of chemicals.”

She said she tries to incorporate nutrition lessons directly into what the students are doing.

“We made pancakes with six to seven ingredients,” she said. She picked up a box of prepared pancake mix.

“If you look at this box, it has 20 to 25 ingredients. Most of them are fillers or so it will last,” said Cobb.

She said they also discuss the cost of buying healthy foods.

“Many people think it’s cheaper to eat fast food, but it’s not. It’s not just the financial cost, but the cost to your body.”

Cobb said she teaches students about using food preserved in different ways.

“You can buy things that are fresh now, like raspberries, but there’s a hefty cost, and they’re transported. You don’t know what the standards are,” Cobb said. “When you buy things that are sourced closer, they may be frozen, but they’re from here. Sometimes frozen or canned is better.”

She said she hopes they will be able to host more classes. The day after the deadline for signing up for the class, Cobb said she got 20 more applications.

“And at the high school level, I’ve had no trouble getting kids to volunteer,” she said.

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