

SWAP IT to DROP IT: Strong Partnerships and Simple Messages Help Promote Healthier Waistlines

Summary

In Brown County, Minn., more than 67 percent of adults are overweight or obese, resulting in an increased risk for heart disease and other chronic conditions. Lack of knowledge on how to make healthier food choices often plays a role. Hearts Beat Back: The Heart of Brown County Project, an initiative led by the Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation in collaboration with Allina Health and Brown County Public Health, set out to help change that in the rural communities of Springfield and Sleepy Eye.

With the help of funding from a Community Transformation Grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Heart of Brown County Project conducted a 15-month SWAP IT to DROP IT™ health promotion initiative that increased identification and promotion of healthier choices. The multi-faceted educational initiative partnered with two local grocery stores, five convenience stores and several worksites to help people learn to make healthier

SWAPs to save just 100 calories each day, lose 10 pounds in a year and improve their overall health. Project leaders had previously experienced strong success with conducting the initiative in the neighboring community of New Ulm.

Challenge

It can be a common misconception among adults that in order to lose weight, they must make *large-scale* changes to both what and how much they eat. They don't realize that small, incremental changes can indeed help them lose weight and realize significant health benefits. The problem can be compounded at the store, as many people have a general lack of knowledge as to how to make healthier choices. At grocery stores, the array of choices and options can be overwhelming. At convenience stores, it can be the opposite — fresh produce or other healthful options are often very limited, while access to unhealthful options such as sugar-sweetened beverages, candy and chips is all too convenient.

Solution

The SWAP IT to DROP IT initiative blanketed the community with messaging on how to make healthier SWAPs and reinforced that every SWAP counts. To cut through the advertising clutter, the initiative ensured that health messages were simple, resonated with the target audience, and inspired action. Messages were distributed via mass media channels such as newspaper articles, billboards and cable TV advertising; social media; and at local worksites, grocery and convenience stores.

Grocery stores in particular are critical allies in improving community health. Store interventions can provide opportunities to increase access and selection of healthy food and beverages. Especially in this rural area where the locally owned grocery stores do not have an in-house dietitian or access to resources from a large corporate parent, they were particularly receptive to the initiative's resources and opportunities.

Twice a month, a registered dietitian led free one-hour grocery store tours to help people learn how to shop with heart health in mind, receive answers to their questions, and learn how to make simple changes in their food and beverage choices to save calories. The grocery stores also posted signage with tips for SWAP-ing, hosted food sampling events, included messages on grocery carts that promoted fruits and vegetables, and added a convenient, information-packed fresh produce guide for shoppers' use.



“ I love to see the interaction of our customers with the dietitian when she's in the store. Our customers are not only shopping, but learning *how* to shop for healthy options. She points out healthy products for our customers that they can find locally at our store. We greatly appreciate the opportunity the partnership provides to better the health of our community and trade area.

— Paul Tauer, Tauer's Supervalu Grocery and Gas



Results

In addition to the participating stores, partnerships with the health care community and local employers yielded an approach where messages were reinforced in multiple places throughout the community. For example, in Springfield, the dietitian was able to encourage patients she personally consulted with at the local clinic to attend the grocery store tours; more than 95 percent of tour participants came as a result of that interaction. Worksites used prepared articles and tips in their newsletters, email messages and social media. Community members, employers and store personnel all provided positive feedback about the messages as well as the tours.

Results from the post-initiative survey showed:

- 60 percent of respondents were familiar with the SWAP IT to DROP IT logo, representing a 42 percent increase from the pre-initiative survey.
- 42 percent of respondents said they had replaced at least one unhealthful item with something recommended in SWAP IT to DROP IT messaging.
- 92 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were confident they could make healthier food and beverage choices.
- 85 percent of respondents at the Springfield grocery store said they had swapped unhealthful items for healthier items as a result of the initiative.

Sustaining Success

Several opportunities are helping ensure sustainability in the Brown County area:

- Due to the success of the monthly store tours, Mayo Clinic Health System Springfield has agreed to continue funding for a registered dietitian to continue the tours at the grocery store in Springfield.
- During the grant period, the project team also worked with local athletic and food personnel from schools and sports organizations throughout New Ulm to make healthier concessions available at area sporting events. The SWAP IT to DROP IT initiative was modified as SWAP IT to ROCK IT to convey the message that healthier food choices can help students and adults alike stay energized and achieve optimal performance. Efforts to maintain healthier concession offerings are continuing.
- The Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation is packaging the SWAP IT to DROP IT materials and will be making them available for customization and use by other interested communities.



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SWAP IT to DROP IT

SWAP FOR
Fiber fills you up so you eat less.

Free Educational Grocery Store Tours and Food Sampling Events at **Tauer's Grocery and Gas, 101 W. Central**

- Join us for a **FREE** practical, informative and fun grocery store tour with a registered dietitian:
 - Thursday, July 17 at 6:30 p.m.
 - Tuesday, July 29 at 1 p.m.
- Free food sampling events:
 - Tuesday, July 8 from 1 to 3 p.m.
 - Thursday, July 24 from 1 to 3 p.m.

Meet at the front of the store. Recipes and tips provided; bring your questions. Tour lasts approximately one hour.

Also make **SWAPs** at these participating **Springfield convenience stores**:

Expressway, 11 E. Rock St., Springfield
Fuel Max, 221 W. Rock St., Springfield

SWAP IT to DROP IT
heartsbeatback.org

SWAP IT to DROP IT is a health campaign from The Heart of Brown County Project, a grant-funded initiative led by the Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation, in collaboration with Allina Health and Brown County Public Health. For more information, visit www.heartsbeatback.org and choose "SWAP IT to DROP IT" under the "Brown County" menu tab.

Get Involved

One of the best places in the community to help educate people on how they can begin making healthier eating choices is at local grocery and convenience stores.

- Establish strong partnerships with stores and create a win-win by ensuring that agreed-upon opportunities are designed with both parties' goals in mind. For example, emphasize that stores that participate will be making it easier for their customers to make healthier choices without changing their store offerings, and that customers will feel like the store values their health and well-being.
- Develop a written participation agreement that outlines agreed-upon roles and responsibilities for the various opportunities.

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