

Our Mission

At Virginia Cooperative Extension our purpose is to advance the well-being of all Virginians. We are made up of Virginia Tech and Virginia State University faculty and staff who address community needs and build on community assets. Our commitment to finding real solutions for our communities is showcased through a variety of initiatives that impact community health.

Our Approach

Virginia Cooperative Extension takes a non-clinical approach to improve community health, prevent disease, and reduce health disparities, recognizing that health outcomes are largely influenced by social, economic, and environmental factors. We aim to address the vital conditions of health and well-being by: 1) providing evidence-based educational programs, and 2) by facilitating community engaged partnerships that will harness our collective power to breakdown social, economic, and environmental barriers to health.

Our People

7 academic specialists with expertise in health promotion and disease prevention

3 specialized agents forging regional community health partnerships

44 local agents providing their communities with resources, training, and education to advance well-being

14 cross-disciplinary program teams addressing the vital conditions for well-being

Addressing Barriers to Health

Partner with Us!

We serve local communities by breaking down **social, economic, and environmental** barriers to health.

Social

- Volunteer development and civic engagement
- Empowering families and positive youth development
- Building collaborative healthcare partnerships

Environmental

- Natural resource management and literacy
- Strengthening food systems and farmers
- Household water quality services and education

Economic

- Family finance and money management
- Financial literacy
- Housing counseling and energy management

Providing Health Education



Dealing with Dementia



Contact Us!

All our health education programs are evidence-based. Our local agents can provide information about which programs are being offered in your area. www.ext.vt.edu

Find us on



Health Education

ADULTS

Virginia Cooperative Extension is advancing the well-being of all Virginians by providing evidence-based educational programs for adults that improve community health.



Balanced Living with Diabetes

6-session program to take control of your diabetes. Learn how to manage diabetes in a supportive environment where you will practice choosing healthy foods and being more active. Lower your A1c blood sugar levels and stay in touch with a class reunion!



Diabetes Prevention Program

A 12 month, 22-session lifestyle change program and support group for those who are at risk of developing Type 2 diabetes. Prediabetes can be reversed! Find the support and encouragement you need to reduce your risk.



**Mental Health
FIRST AID**

Mental Health First Aid

8-hour training certification to learn how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges among children ages 12-18 or among adults in the workplace.



Vaccine Ambassadors

10-hour training for volunteers to learn about the science of immunizations, current issues surrounding vaccines and how to improve access to vaccinations in your community.

Extension Collaborative on Immunization Teaching & Engagement

Lifelong Improvements through Fitness Together (LIFT)

8-week strength, flexibility, and balance program that promotes mindful movement. Helps aging adults improve strength and mobility, reduce risk of falls, and improve overall quality of life in a way that is fun, connected, and upLIFTing!



Dealing with Dementia

4-hour supportive workshop to help caregivers navigate the unique challenges of caring for someone with dementia. Learn how to manage problem behaviors, handle stress, and leave with a better understanding of dementia.



ServSafe® Retail Food Courses

4-hr food handler course for adults who are employees at VA food establishments. The Certified Food Protection Manager is an 8-hour course for food employees with supervisory responsibilities. Passing score on final exam is required.



Chronic Disease Self-Management

6-week program for adults living with chronic conditions to build a toolbox of strategies that will help them lead a fuller life. Strategies are useful for a variety of conditions like arthritis, depression, heart disease, cancer, and more.



Family Nutrition Program

A variety of programs empowering adults to take charge of their health by teaching skills like cooking, healthy eating, managing a food budget, and living an active lifestyle. Initiatives also improve access to affordable, nutritious foods through partnerships with food retailers, food pantries, farmers markets, and gardens.



These programs are federally funded and only available to households/ individuals with low-incomes.



Master Food Volunteers

A volunteer program with 20-30 hours of annual service for adults who are passionate about healthy lifestyles, food safety, food preservation, and cooking. Initial onboarding includes an 8-week training course. Make a difference in your community!

Contact your local extension office to learn which programs are being offered in your area.

Find your local office at ext.vt.edu/offices.html or scan the QR code.



Health Education

Virginia Cooperative Extension is advancing the well-being of all Virginians by providing evidence-based educational programs for youth that improve community health.

YOUTH



4H Healthy Living

A variety of programs that help youth learn to manage their social-emotional wellbeing. Includes four signature programs: 4H Yoga, Get Experience in Mindfulness (GEM), Your Feelings Matter (YFM), and Your Thoughts Matter (YTM).

4H Yoga combines movement with breathing to strengthen the mind and body. GEM contains 5 lessons that emphasize stress management and mindfulness for ages 10 & up. YFM and YTM provide workbooks with a series of activities that teach youth about emotions and mental health.



Teen Cuisine

6-week cooking program that teaches nutrition and healthy eating through culinary skills. Program is intended for youth in grades 6-12.



Flourishing in the Garden

7-week garden-based youth program that provides a holistic approach to mind-body-land. Incorporates gardening, nutrition education, and mindfulness through permaculture and yoga principles. Focuses on experiential learning through cooking and practicing yoga together.



Botvin LifeSkills® Training

A program developed to help strengthen caretaker/children relationships and to prevent substance abuse and violence among youth. Promotes healthy alternatives to risky behavior. Curricula are available for grades 3-10 and the number of sessions vary by age group.



Family Nutrition Program

A variety of curricula empowering youth to take charge of their health. Programs teach skills like cooking, healthy eating, and living an active lifestyle. Initiatives focus on partnering with schools and afterschool programs to train teachers on nutrition curricula and to improve access to affordable, nutritious foods in schools.

These programs are federally funded and only available to households/ individuals with low-incomes.

Virginia Cooperative Extension seeks to offer health education programs for adults and youth in partnership with community-based organizations. Our impact is stronger together! We have experience partnering with a wide variety of community-based organizations:



Libraries



Senior Centers



Work Places



Housing Communities



Health Organizations



Recreation Centers



Schools



Faith-based Organizations

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Preventing & Managing Chronic Disease

Virginia Cooperative Extension positively impacts the health of our communities by providing evidence-based programs that teach adults how to prevent and manage chronic diseases like diabetes. All programs are offered in partnership with the Virginia Tech Center for Public Health Practice and Research.

Balanced Living with Diabetes

For adults living with Type 2 Diabetes and their families.

Find support to eat healthier, be more active, and take control of Type 2 diabetes.

6-session, in-person program

You will:

- Learn how to manage Type 2 diabetes and lower A1c
- Practice choosing healthy foods and taste recipes
- Practice being more active and learn at-home exercise options

Diabetes Prevention Program

For adults who are at risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes.

Find ongoing support to reduce your risk through lifestyle change, weight loss, and stress reduction.

12 month, virtual or in-person

You will:

- Reduce your risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes
- Learn how to stay motivated and overcome challenges
- Increase daily movement and improve eating habits

Living Well with Chronic Conditions

For adults living with chronic conditions and their families.

Find support to lead a fuller life and take an active role in managing your chronic condition.

6-week, virtual program

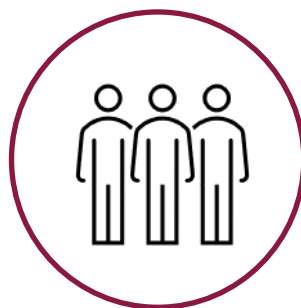
You will:

- Learn how to work with your healthcare team and manage medications
- Practice mindfulness and stress management
- Increase confidence communicating with loved ones about your condition

2023 Impacts



1/3 of Balanced Living with Diabetes adults reduced their A1c (blood sugar levels) to below 7%



110 adults graduated from the Diabetes Prevention Program



95% reported they better understood how to manage symptoms of their chronic condition

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Encouraging Healthy Lifestyles

Virginia Cooperative Extension provides evidence-based programs on nutrition, physical activity, food safety, and food preservation to encourage healthy lifestyles for all Virginians. We take a community-engaged approach by implementing programs in tandem with community partners and by training volunteer educators.

Nutrition & Physical Activity

Family Nutrition Program (funded by EFNEP, SNAP-Ed)

6-week youth programs

Encourage healthy eating and promote physical activity at schools where at least 50% of youth are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

4 to 6-week adult programs

Increase consumption of nourishing foods, build healthy eating habits, and increase physical activity for adults with low-incomes.

Community Partnerships

Promote access to nutritious foods in partnership with schools, food pantries, farmers markets, healthy retailers, and community gardens that are in areas with high poverty levels.

FitX - Fun, Family, Fitness

8-week adult program

Increase confidence in your ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle by joining a group that will teach skills to track physical activity, eat more fruits & vegetables, and increase daily movement.

LIFT - Lifelong Improvements through Fitness Together

8-week older adult program

Improve strength & mobility, build community connections, and learn about healthy food as you in age-in-place with your peers.

FiG- Flourishing in the Garden

7-week youth program

Experiential learning through gardening, cooking healthy foods, and practicing yoga for a holistic approach to mind-body-land.

Food Safety & Preservation

Master Food Volunteers

8-week training course

Volunteers who are passionate about healthy lifestyles, food safety, food preservation, and cooking learn how to make a difference in their community.

20 to 30 hours of annual service

Becoming part of the MFV community is an ongoing commitment with 20-30 hours of service required per year to remain active. 30 hours of service are required during the first year of service.

ServSafe® Retail Food Courses

Certified Food Protection Manager Course (8 hours)

Training for adults with supervisory responsibilities at VA food establishments with the authority to direct food prep and service.

Food Handler Course (4 hours)

Training for adults who are employees at VA food establishments needing to learn best practices for safe food handling.

Single Session Education

Food Preservation

Learn how to preserve foods at home. Courses are offered online and in-person with in-person programs providing opportunities for hands-on practice with a variety of canning techniques.

Food Allergen Awareness

Learn ways to decrease risk of allergen cross-contact when preparing and serving food.

Cooking for Crowds

Learn safe food handling tips when cooking for a crowd at local events, community gatherings, or potlucks with loved ones.

**2023
Impacts**



1,867 adults
participated in food
safety and preservation
programs



12,305 youth
participated in nutrition
education through the
Family Nutrition program



775 hours
of service were
completed by
Master Food
Volunteers

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Nutrition & Physical Activity Success Story

Flourishing in the Garden (FiG) is a new evidence-based, holistic wellbeing program that reflects the 4H Youth Thrive Model to develop healthy, resilient, and thriving youth. The 7-week garden-based youth program incorporates nutrition education, mindfulness, and cooking experiences through experiential learning. VCE professionals piloted the FiG program during summer 2023 with youth living in a subsidized housing community in York County, VA. A program assistant implemented the program along with the local ANR agent. They delivered the program to 20 youth ranging in age from grades K-7. The majority of participants were Black or African American (90%) and in grades 5-7 (60%). Youth who participated in the program decreased their soda consumption, increased the likelihood of choosing fruit as a snack, and increased their likelihood to read Nutrition Facts labels. One youth also shared that he struggled with anger and focus during school, but that the box breathing exercises he learned during the FiG program helped him manage his anger in a productive way.



FiG participants get their hands dirty in the garden.



A client-choice pantry offers healthy refrigerated options.

Partnership Spotlight: Family Nutrition Program

Virginia SNAP-Ed has initiated a partnership with the Foodbank Federation of Virginia to launch the healthy pantry initiative starting in FY2024. The first steps of this partnership include Virginia SNAP-Ed providing technical assistance and training to participating pantries. The trainings will be housed on a Learning Management System called Acorn that will be available statewide to help pantries implement 20 best practices identified through the healthy pantry initiative. Virginia SNAP-Ed is a central member of the Foodbank Federation of Virginia, Education Committee that is responsible for creating recorded trainings. Three trainings were recorded in 2023 and a pilot to test the first trainings was planned for December 2023, in partnership with James Madison University. Virginia SNAP-Ed will also assist with the evaluation of food pantry survey data as part of the partnership. The data will be used to measure the change in the number of healthy pantry practices adopted as well as the positive health impacts of these practices on pantry neighbors.

Food Safety & Preservation Success Story

The **Master Food Volunteer (MFV) program** was first implemented by VCE in 2009 and requires adults to complete an in-depth 30-hour curriculum training prior to becoming an active volunteer. MFV are trained on how to make healthy food choices, how to increase physical activity, and how to prepare healthy affordable foods. After completing 30 hours of required training, MFV may offer programs to their communities virtually or in-person at healthcare facilities, farmers markets, schools, and community centers. During 2023, several programs were offered by MFV in Mecklenburg County, VA on a variety of health-related topics like cooking for kidney health, eating for your eyes, supporting a healthy thyroid, and more. Across the Commonwealth, forty-four (44) active MFV reported 775 hours of service and reached over 2,200 direct contacts in 2023. The hours dedicated by MFV in 2023 are equivalent to approximately \$25,000 worth of service to Virginians.



\$25,257

worth of service to
Virginians in 2023

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Promoting Social-Emotional Health

Virginia Cooperative Extension positively impacts the health of our communities by providing evidence-based programs that promote social-emotional well-being. All programs are offered in partnership with the Virginia Tech Center for Public Health Practice and Research. The Virginia Cooperative Extension, Collaborative Opioid Prevention Education (COPE) team currently implements Mental Health First Aid and Botvin LifeSkills® curricula to address social-emotional well-being.



Parents

To help parents or guardians prepare their teens for adulthood and prevent risky behavior. Designed for those with youth in grades 6-9.

Up to 7 sessions

Youth

To help youth learn skills to manage difficult emotions and prevent risky behavior. Improves social skills, self-management skills, and drug resistance.

Up to 18 sessions



Adult

To train adults to serve their peers during a mental health crisis.

Increase knowledge about adult mental health and learn the ALGEE action plan.

8 hour training

Youth

To train adults to serve youth during a mental health crisis.

Increase knowledge about youth mental health and learn the ALGEE action plan.

8 hour training

2023 Impacts



2,310 youth completed Botvin LifeSkills® Training in church or school



195 parents who are currently incarcerated completed Botvin Parent sessions



295 trained as Mental Health First Aiders for youth or adults



4 school divisions



6 community health organizations



2 mental wellness organizations



2 state agencies

Contact Jennifer Fichthorn, COPE Project Coordinator, for more information about training availability in your area: jenniferf19@vt.edu



Virginia Tech Center for Public Health Practice and Research