

Back to basics approach to home cooking the key to turning around Australia's poor eating habits

October 28 2014, by Mandi O'garretty

The back to basics approach to home cooking taught through Jamie's Ministry of Food Australia program is successfully changing the eating habits of Australians, Deakin University research has found.

Deakin Population Health researchers, in collaboration with colleagues at The University of Melbourne, completed the first evaluation of the impact the 10-week cooking skills program had on the cooking and eating habits of participants. The researchers found the program resulted in an increase in home-cooked meals and vegetable consumption and that participants ate less take away food. These results were sustained six months after participating in the program.

Deakin's Professor Marj Moodie said that with poor diet a major cause of disease world-wide, it is essential that ways are found to make healthy eating at home cheap, quick and easy.

"It is clear from the results of this study that equipping people with the skills and knowledge to [cook](#) low cost meals from scratch can change [eating habits](#) for the better," Professor Moodie said.

"Not only did the positive changes occur at the end of the program, they were sustained six months later which suggests long-term changes in people's eating behaviour.

"Jamie's Ministry of Food Australia should therefore be considered in any package of [public health strategies](#) that target [healthy eating](#)."

Cooking at home has been shown to be associated with a healthier diet. A key finding from the study was an increase in participant's skills and confidence in daily food preparation and cooking with fresh ingredients.

"A lack of cooking confidence has been found to be a major barrier to the production of home-cooked meals and in particular preparation of vegetables," Professor Moodie said.

"We found that the program increased participants' confidence and enabled them to cook more at home. It also had a positive influence on their knowledge, attitude and beliefs around cooking and reduced cooking barriers such as time and made cooking a more enjoyable and satisfying experience.

"Participants' behaviours towards a healthier diet were also positively changed. Not only were participants preparing more meals from scratch using basic ingredients, they were consuming more vegetables, adding more vegetables to their main meal and consuming less take-away. Buying more vegetables was also found to be possible without any extra expense to the overall household weekly food spend which is in contrast to popular belief that it costs more to eat healthily.

"The increase in vegetable intake by more than half a serve, which was sustained six months after the program ceased, is an important finding in light of current trends in declining vegetable intake in Australia and the growing evidence of the protective benefit of increased [vegetable intake](#) for the prevention of certain diseases such as [coronary heart disease](#) and stroke.

"The program appeared to also have some flow on benefits in bringing

families closer together to cook and eat together but also to share cooking knowledge and skills in ways done traditionally by previous generations."

Provided by Deakin University

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