

September 25, 2017

Sodium Reduction Initiative Launched at UB

Campus Dining partners with Cornell Cooperative Extension through five-year grant from NYS Department of Health; CDC

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Campus Dining and Shops (CDS) at the University at Buffalo is collaborating with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Niagara County as part of a five-year, \$1.975 million grant that the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) was awarded from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention for the Sodium Reduction in Communities Program. The goal of the program is to implement and evaluate community-based strategies for reducing sodium consumption in early childhood education centers along with universities and colleges in four New York counties.

Lori Bendersky, MS, RD, CDN for Campus Dining and Shops spearheaded the initiative with Kaitlyn Summers, MS, RDN for Cornell Cooperative Extension of Niagara County this past spring semester. “Our goal is to focus our efforts on ‘behind the scenes’ and work with the dining services staff and chefs to replace high sodium items or modify recipes to reduce sodium levels,” said Summers. “This program will impact more than 46,000 students enrolled across targeted colleges and universities.

Using Foodservice Suite[®], a nutritional analysis software program, CDS focused on Grab n’ Go items which they produce over 2,000 each day. “We started with Grab n’ Go because these items are distributed across campus and available in many of our units,” said Bendersky. One example was the change to an Everything Pretzel Thin from a traditional pretzel thin which reduced sodium in the house-made Hummus Cups by 45%.



Kaitlyn Summers (left) and Lori Bendersky show off two Grab n’ Go items that were recently modified to reduce sodium levels.

The most significant change came in deli meats, where sodium is high due to processing and preserving. The CDS team, led by Executive Chef Neal Plazio and Purchasing Manager Jorge Reinoso, sourced a high quality, reduced sodium deli turkey to replace their existing deli turkey. The result was a 42% reduction in sodium. “This is huge,” said Plazio. “Deli turkey is one of our largest volume items so it’s really going to make a big impact.”

New menu items with lower sodium have also been introduced this fall semester with the help of a recently purchased Vegetable Srializer. This tool turns fresh vegetables into faux-noodles, a trend that Bendersky says is really catching on with today’s college students. “Our new low sodium Spiralized Zucchini Caprese Salad is simple ingredients but very colorful and attractive, something our students look for in dishes.” Another new trendy item is Overnight Oats and the CDS team is creating low sodium recipes using this steeping method. “We soak steel-cut oats overnight in Almond Milk and Greek Yogurt and then top them with fresh strawberries and granola for a nutritious and satisfying breakfast item or snack,” added Plazio.

Sodium reduction is an effective strategy in managing hypertension and while college students may not be in the high risk area, it’s important as they are learning to make their own food choices as they start out in their path to adulthood. Over the next four years of the grant, strategies to reduce sodium at UB will focus on gradual reductions of sodium targets for different food categories, identification of lower sodium products with distributors, training of staff on techniques and changes to products, recipes, or portion sizes, and venue-specific behavior modification approaches to increase demand or access to lower sodium food.

“We are extremely excited to be involved in this initiative,” said Jeff Brady, executive director for Campus Dining and Shops. “In recent years, we have added more healthy items than ever before and our students, faculty and staff have responded positively. From providing more unsweetened beverage choices to increasing our plant-based protein offerings, we are continuously looking to provide healthier alternatives that are full of flavor.”

According to Bendersky, CDS has already begun modifying recipes. “We are slightly reducing the portion sizes of high sodium ingredients, such as cheeses and dressings, in our popular quinoa bowls without changing the taste our customers love.” CDS and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Niagara County are currently planning educational events for students, faculty and staff which will take place during the semester and during February which is American Heart Month.

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UB’s Campus Dining & Shops’ (CDS) primary purpose is to offer a variety of high quality, high value, and innovative dining options and services designed to fit the varied lifestyles and nutritional needs of the university community. CDS is a multi-unit company employing over 1,300 people. In addition to providing the university’s dining services, CDS also serves the UB community through management of the UB Card Office, Three Pillars Catering, Retail and Convenience Stores, and Vending.