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Cooking Matters expands classes to seniors

By JADE MCDOWELL East Oregonian Apr 17, 2019



Seniors make pasta with beans and greens during a Cooking Matters class at the Senior Center in Hermiston on Wednesday.

Staff photo by Jade McDowell

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It's never too late to learn how to cook.

On Wednesday at the Harkenrider Senior Activity Center in Hermiston, 16 senior citizens were steaming asparagus and being quizzed about saturated fats at a Cooking Matters class.

Kathy Burns said she was there because she wanted to move beyond heating things up in a microwave and learn recipes that fit diet restrictions her doctor had given her.

"I'm the worst cook in the world," she said.

The free, six-week class sends participants home with a free cookbook and ingredients for the week's recipes at the end of each two-hour session.

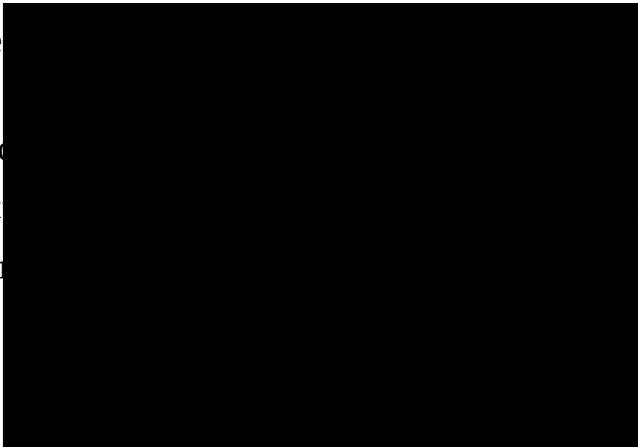
Burns said she was glad the senior center was willing to host the classes so that seniors can learn new skills. She said she wished more men were taking advantage of the opportunity (there was only one present Wednesday) because sometimes seniors find themselves in a tough spot when the spouse who does all the cooking passes away.

Angie Treadwell, the class' instructor, usually teaches Cooking Matters classes to parents and children as part of a partnership between Umatilla Morrow County Head Start, Oregon State University Extension and area school districts.

She said OSU plans to expand the Cooking Matters program to seniors over the next few years, and seniors in Hermiston are helping to pilot the idea thanks to a generous grant from Lamb Weston. Each week she gets feedback from class members — portion sizes are too large, there aren't enough lactose-free options — and passes it on to the university.

"We're trying to find out what seniors want," she

Treadwell said there are many health issues seniors face with special diets. Often as people age they start feeling like it's not just about diet. They suddenly find themselves with special dietary needs.



“Nutrition is so important in older adults,” she said. “It can make a huge difference in medical costs.”

Cooking classes provide a social outlet too. Lupe Housden said she ended up in the class because a friend signed her up.

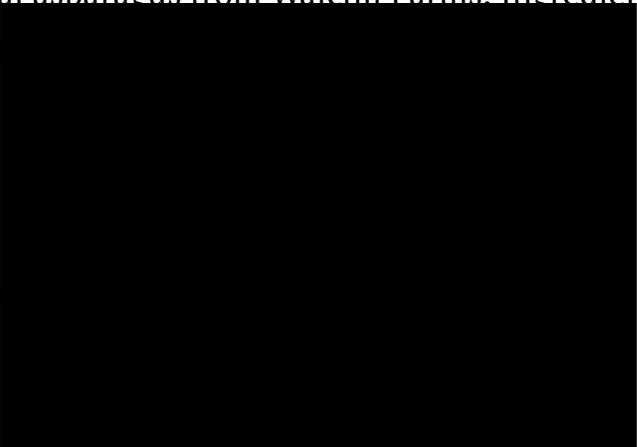
“It’s always nice to have a group to cook with,” she said.

Housden said she has also learned a lot about how to read labels on food, and the importance of whole grains.

On Wednesday Treadwell started off by asking participants if their cooking habits had changed after their first two classes. One woman said she had made the previous week’s recipe and had so many leftovers she shared with her neighbors. Another said she made one of the recipes but it didn’t turn out well. A third said she had put her own spin on it with ingredients she had at home.

One recipe — a southwest-style Cowboy Salad — was so popular that the senior center is adding it to their lunch menu.

After discussing recipes Treadwell taught the group about different types of fats and how to look for healthier ones. She answered a variety of questions about the health of different foods and summed up her advice as eating food “as close to the form nature gave you as possible and using moderation in all things.”

During the hands-on portion of the class, the group worked together to make pasta with beans and greens, and ginger asparagus using fresh local asparagus from Walchli Farms. Ingredients for both recipes were waiting for them in a take-


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