



community food centres
CANADA good food is just the beginning

EVALUATING THE LINK BETWEEN FOOD & MENTAL HEALTH

Some basic tips for program evaluation in the face of complexity...

1. Make sure your program objectives align well with the outcomes – don't over-claim your reach
2. Time matters – for shorter/less contact hour programs look for changes in awareness and knowledge, for longer/high contact hour programs look for changes in confidence and behaviours
3. Because of the complexity and multi-determinants of mental health, strive to demonstrate that your programs contributed to changes in your participant's mental health, rather than try to prove direct causation
4. Leave room to capture unexpected outcomes
5. Ask "why not" as a follow-up to help distinguish issues within your program or factors outside of your program

Some examples of questions to evaluate food programs striving to positively impact the mental health of participants:

Have you noticed any changes in your mental health since you started participating in this program? If yes, please describe the change(s). If you answered "no", why do you think your mental health has not changed during this time?

What part of this program do you think contributed most to your improved mental health? 100% the food, mostly the food/partly the social aspect, equally the food and the social aspect, mostly the social aspect/partly the food, 100% the social aspect.

Did you make a new friend in this program? Yes No

What is it about this program that you value most? (Or what would you say the most important part of this program is?)

Did you learn anything new in the program about the link between food and mental health? If yes, what is the most important thing you learned? If not, why not?

Because of what you learned in the program, do you feel more confident that you can identify foods that could impact your mental health?



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For pre/post questions (possible response options – all of the time, most of the time, a good bit of the time, some of the time, a little of the time, none of the time) – some are examples from the Canadian Community Healthy Survey.

During the past 4 weeks, how often have you been a happy person?

During the past 4 weeks, how often has your stress level kept you from completing your day-to-day activities?

During the past 4 weeks, how much of the time have you felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up?

During the past 4 weeks, how much of the time did you have a lot of energy?

In the past week, how many healthy meals did you cook/prepare “from scratch” at home?

If you were going to pose the above questions in a post-only situation (for example, no baseline information from participants or drop-in designed program), you need to capture how long/how many times the participant has been to the program and you could phrase the questions like this...

Since you’ve been coming to the ABC program, do you find your level of happiness has increased/decreased/stayed the same?

Since you’ve been coming to the XYZ program, do you find your stress level has increased/decreased/stayed the same?

While participating in the QRS program, has the amount of times you felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up increased/decreased/stayed the same?

Because of what you learned in the LMN program, are you cooking more healthy meals “from scratch” at home?

You may also want to follow up on those that reply “decreased” or “stayed the same” to find out why the positive change you hoped to see didn’t happen – you may find some people were already stress-free or happy or never feel down in the dumps.

There are many examples of great evaluation tools and questions for food and wellness programs – if you’ve got one that has proven valuable to your organization, we would love to hear from you!