



National Summit to Increase Social Connections

Welcome to Day 1!

Summit Housekeeping

Recording and Slides

- The recording and slides from both days of the Summit will be shared following the event on our website:
www.committtoconnect.org

Q&A

- You can submit questions for the speakers at any time. On the Zoom module on the bottom of your screen, click the Q&A icon, type your question in the box and submit.

Chat

- Engage in the chat to connect with other attendees and conveners.



Accessibility and Support

ASL/CART Services

- ASL/CART services will be provided for this event. A video stream of an ASL interpreter will be pinned on the screen so all attendees can view the interpreter.
- To access CART live transcription of the event, click on the CC Live Transcript button in the control bar at the bottom of the Zoom window.

Technical Assistance

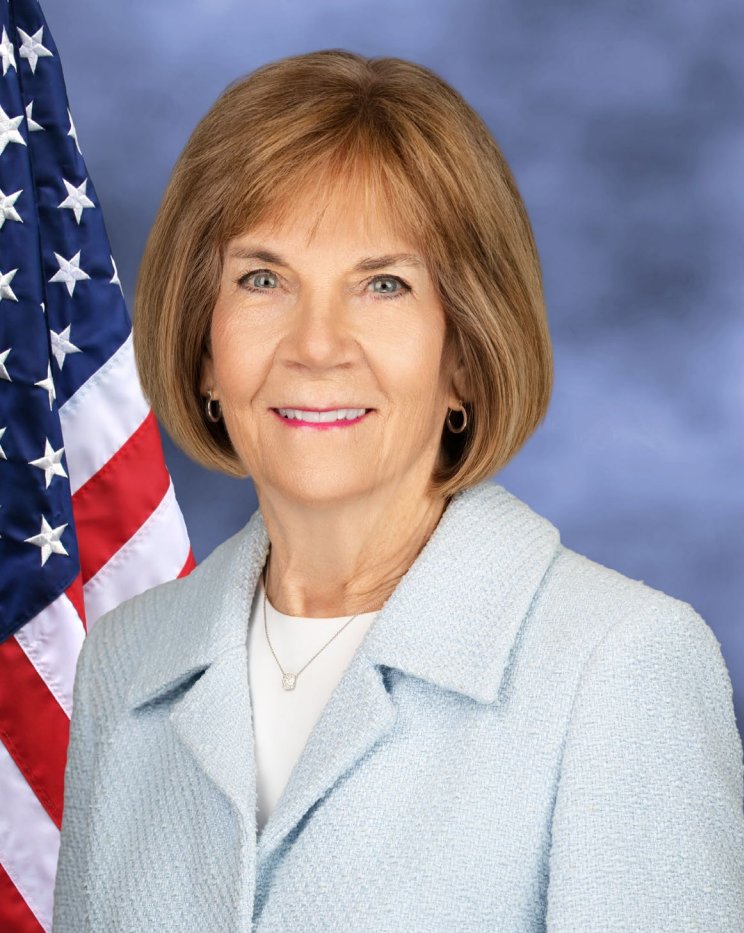
- To get our attention if you need tech assistance: Raise or Lower Hand: Alt + Y

Screen Reader Users: Reduce unwanted chatter

- Request speech on demand: Insert, Spacebar, “S”



Opening Remarks



Mary Lazare

Principal Deputy
Administrator, serving as
the senior official
performing the duties of
the ACL Administrator
and Assistant Secretary
for Aging



Opening Remarks



Alice Kelsey

Deputy Director, Administration
on Aging, Administration for
Community Living



Eating with Others: Congregate Dining and Socialization

- Moderator: Kimberly Reynolds, Commissioner of Aging Services, Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services
- Justin Moor, President/CEO, Area Office on Aging of Northwestern Ohio, Inc.
- Karl Schatz, Executive Director/Co-founder, Community Plate
- Maggi Monroe, Executive Director, Hillsdale County Senior Services Center, Inc.





Barbie Harrison
Board
Chairwoman



Justin Moor
President / CEO



Meals, Mingling, and Moving More

Declining Dining Site Meal Participation



The Move



Image by: Ayse Birsal

Doubled Meal Participation



Old Location



New Location

Moving More



Turning a Meal ...



... Into a Crowning Moment



Using the Name That is the Draw





Wherever The Need is the Greatest



AREA OFFICE ON AGING OF NORTHWESTERN OHIO



**Home
Care**



Nutrition



**Grandparents
& Relatives
Raising
Children**



Volunteer



Caregiving



**Senior
Center
Services**



**Case
Management**



Housing

Community Plate

Serving community one food story at a time.



The Power of the Potluck

Community Plate fosters connection and builds community through a common language of food, shared food stories and recipes, and the preservation of family food histories.



"As I finish my tenure as
Surgeon General, this is my
parting prescription, my final
wish for all of us:

Choose community."

—Dr. Vivek
Murthy

19th &
21st Surgeon
General
of the
United States



More than half of Americans report that they live in communities with no or minimal access to places where they can meet or talk to their neighbors.

Survey Center on American Life:
Disconnected: The Growing Class Divide in American Civic Life

When asked about the barriers Americans face in connecting across difference, the most commonly cited barrier is a lack of opportunity.

More in Common: The Connection Opportunity



The Story Sharing Potluck Supper



Norway



Skowhegan

More than 50 suppers across all
16 Maine Counties in 3 years



Westbrook

Recipe For Success

- Local partnership & collaboration
- Setting the table for sustainability & care
- Permission structure for connection
- Scaffolding for conversation
- Intentional framework for attention, generosity, belonging, & gratitude
- Remove barriers to participation



The Power of the Potluck

- Fundamental humanity of breaking bread together
- Food is non-partisan, intergenerational, and cross-cultural. It bridges religious and economic divides.
- Everyone is giving and receiving
- Stories are baked in
- Delicious and fun!



Food Focused Story Prompts

- Share a story about a food that every time you eat it reminds you of a specific person / place.
- Share a story about a food that a parent or grandparent made that you never liked.
- Share a story about a food you once hated, but now you love.
- Share a story about a serving dish, utensil, cookbook, or other kitchen object that has meaning for you.
- Share a story about the best _____ you ever tasted. What made it the best?



Storytelling =
Connection =
Improved Health

- Neural Coupling
- Reduced cortisol (stress)
- Increases levels of oxytocin (trust & empathy)
- Increases levels of dopamine (focus & memory retention)



"It's a step of courage to sit down next to strangers with the intention of having a conversation, and yet, there we were- long tables full of folks seeking positive and meaningful connections with people they just met! After the meal was finished, so many continued chatting as if they had been friends for years."

-Dyan McCarthy-Clark

East Sangerville Grange, Community
Partner



The Power of the Potluck

- Doesn't have to be fancy, but small touches help
- Don't worry about assigning food
- Encourage people to sit with people they don't know
- Facilitate conversation & connection
- Most important: Just do it.





Our 2023 Community Needs Assessment showed that
Loneliness and isolation still ranked #1 as the most
difficult issue facing older adults in our region.
Connection Café is our response to that need.
Est: 2023

Connection Café

1-hour experience designed to
help people meet others



WellWise Services
Area Agency on Aging

Connection Café

COME MEET PEOPLE
AND ENJOY FOOD, TOPICS, AND FUN



**3RD WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH
1:00-2:00PM
PERENNIAL PARK: 320 W. BACON ST.,
HILLSDALE, MI 49242**



PERENNIAL PARK
HILLSDALE COUNTY SENIOR SERVICES CENTER
320 W. BACON ST. • HILLSDALE, MI 49242
(517) 837-2422 • (800) 479-3348
www.hillswisdomentality.org

**OPTIONAL: ARRIVE AT 12:30 FOR LUNCH UPSTAIRS:
SUGGESTED DONATION OF \$5.00**

**CALL AHEAD TO RESERVE A SEAT
AMANDA MARSH @ WELLWISE SERVICES 517-592-1974**

How It Works: Essential Components

- **Paired with Congregate Meal Site.** Offered after the meal is done but includes a snack & beverage. Host organization helps promote and recruit attendees they know could benefit.
- **Personal Outreach:** monthly calls and emailed reminders to encourage reconnection.
- **Drop-Ins Are Welcomed.** No on-going commitment required.
- **Be Welcoming!** Celebrate every person who arrives! Use volunteers as greeters and table partners to fill-in with conversation
- **Have an Engaging and Skilled Facilitator.** Scripted format includes:
 - **Intentional Icebreakers** to talk with people next to them
 - **Large Group interactive discussions** built in
 - **Handouts/Take-Aways** for personal growth
 - Encourage people to **exchange information**
 - **“Stay Connected” table** with resources, sign-up sheets, referrals for added support



Additional Elements

- Provide nametags to easily call people by name
- Outside & Indoor Signage
- Café music on Echo Dot
- Themed Centerpieces & Decor



SAMPLE TOPICS “on the MENU”

- ▶ **How to Make and Keep Friends As We Age**
- ▶ **Decluttering: How to Reduce and De-Stress**
- ▶ **Creating a Bucket List**
- ▶ **Caregiver Burnout: How to Recognize, Avoid, and Address It**
- ▶ **Improving Your Sleep**
- ▶ **Anxiety Management for Yourself and in Caring for Others**
- ▶ **Getting Unstuck and Into Better Health Habits**
- ▶ **Setting Healthy Boundaries**

MORE TOPICS “SERVED UP” on the MENU

- ▶ **Re-Engaging in Life: Building Resilience and Stamina**
- ▶ **Healthy Shopping and Cooking for One or Two**
- ▶ **Managing Grief and Loss**
- ▶ **Calming Behaviors and Mindfulness**
- ▶ **Scam Protection**
- ▶ **Holding End of Life Discussions & Advance Care Planning**
- ▶ **Embracing Technology: Helpful Gadgets/AT Demonstration**
- ▶ **Preparing for the Unexpected: Who Would Manage If I Can't Do It Myself?**

Fun, interactive activities and guided icebreakers encourage conversation



Have attendees share their own interests, stories, and talents! They leave feeling good about themselves.



Congregate Lunch Site Success

- Integrate holiday-themed activities and celebrations into congregate lunch programs to foster community engagement and cultural recognition.
- Promote a collaborative TEAM approach that encourages partnership, communication, and shared responsibility among staff, volunteers, and participants.
- Strengthen outreach efforts by building relationships with local businesses, community organizations, and nonprofit partners to secure support and resources.
- Encourage active participation and input from congregate meal program members in planning and program development.
- Increase community awareness of congregate meal services and extend invitations to state and local elected officials and community leaders to visit and engage with participants.



Goals & Objectives



Two kitchen staff members from the Hillsdale County Senior Services Center received their certificates for Hospitality Business Management in 2025.



Leverage professional memberships for free or low-cost education and professional development opportunities.



Utilize food service partnership nutrition expos to motivate staff, enhance collaboration, and ignite new ideas.



Expand participation in nutrition association networking events and increase opportunities for professional collaboration.



Strengthen leadership and staff visibility and engagement at congregate programs and events.



Benchmark



Actively solicit feedback from congregate members and remain responsive to opportunities for positive change.



Thank you!

Great work is never the work of a single voice-it is the result of many compassionate people moving in the same direction. When purpose, empathy, and commitment come together, extraordinary things become possible!





Questions and Discussion

Please submit your questions or comments through the Q&A.



National Summit to Increase Social Connections

Please enjoy a brief break.

Home-Delivered Meals as an Opportunity for Connection, Screening, and Referral

- Moderator: Laura Belazis, Senior Director of Strategy and Impact, Meals on Wheels America
- Ana Medina, President/CEO, Central Arizona Aging
- Tasha Romo, Director of Nutrition and Activities, Humboldt Senior Resource Center





Fireside Chat: Home-Delivered Meals as an Opportunity for Connection, Screening, and Referral

MODERATOR

Laura Belazis, MPH | Senior Director of Strategy and Impact, Meals on Wheels America

PANELISTS

Ana Medina | President/CEO, Central Arizona Aging

Tasha Romo | Director of Nutrition and Activities, Humboldt Senior Resource Center



Who We Are

For more than 50 years, Meals on Wheels America has worked to empower local providers to strengthen their communities, one senior at a time.



Our vision: An America where all seniors live nourished lives with independence and dignity.



Our mission: To empower local community programs to improve the health and quality of life of the seniors they serve so that no one is left hungry or isolated.

Everything we do at a national level is to ensure every senior who needs Meals on Wheels gets it.



About Meals on Wheels Clients

Nearly 60% of Meals on Wheels home-delivered meal clients live alone. Often, our volunteers are the only people they see all day.

- **83%** take 3+ medications daily
- **65%** are women
- **58%** are age 75+
- **54%** worry about falling
- **19%** live in rural areas



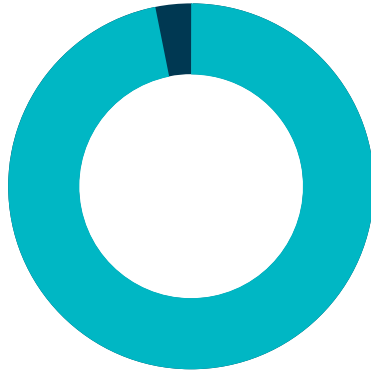
Loneliness and Isolation

Social isolation and loneliness are growing issues affecting an increasing number of seniors in our country. Our social networks tend to shrink as we age, and 56% of older adults report feeling lonely.

For many, the Meals on Wheels volunteer is the only human contact they have all day.

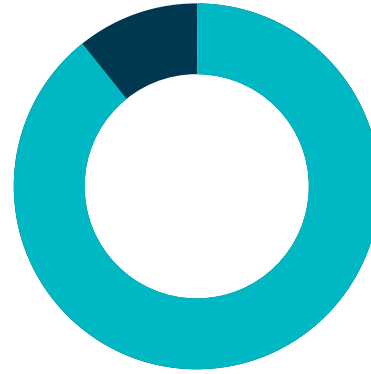


The Power of Social Connection



92%

of Meals on Wheels providers support clients with social connection opportunities beyond the meal



78%

of home-delivered meal participants say knowing they will receive regular visit helps them feel safer



53%

of participants reported greater social connection after participating in a Meals on Wheels friendly calling program

Making the Connection

Meals on Wheels is there when friends and family can't be. Every senior has unique needs, and local providers offer meaningful ways to ensure they feel supported and connected.

- Friendly calling
- Friendly visiting
- Pet assistance
- Group classes and activities
- Opportunities to volunteer



Today's Conversation

National Summit to Increase
Social Connection
June 23, 2026

MODERATOR

Laura Belazis, MPH
Sr. Director of Strategy & Impact
Meals on Wheels America

What We'll Explore

01 Social Connection

How home-delivered meals create meaningful, trusted connection for homebound older adults — and why that contact matters.

02 Referral & Service Coordination

How the Meals on Wheels network connects clients to broader community services and support beyond the meal.

FEATURED SPEAKERS

Ana Medina | President/CEO, Central Arizona Aging

Tasha Romo | Director of Nutrition and Activities, Humboldt Senior Resource Center

ARTS-N'-MEALS CONNECTING RURAL SENIORS THROUGH CREATIVITY, NUTRITION, AND COMMUNITY

Central Arizona Aging
Area Agency on Aging Region V
Arizona

Presented by:
Ana G. Medina
President & CEO



THE CHALLENGE

RURAL OLDER ADULTS WERE BEING LEFT BEHIND

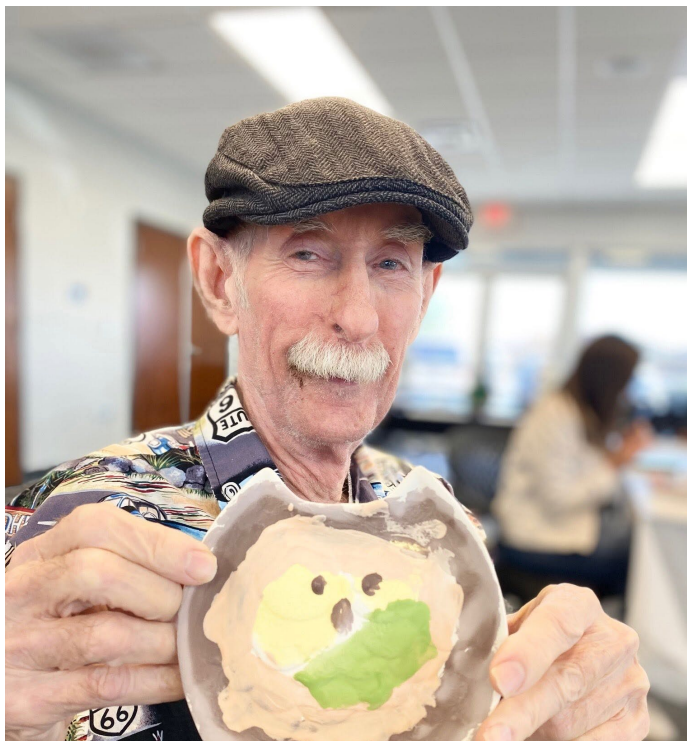
In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for older adults, particularly those living in remote rural communities without access to senior centers.

Many seniors experienced:

- Increased social isolation
- Limited access to nutritious meals
- Reduced opportunities for social engagement
- Lack of awareness of available community resources
- Transportation barriers

Central Arizona Aging recognized an urgent need to develop a new outreach model that would safely connect isolated seniors with essential services and meaningful human interaction to reduce impacts on physical and mental health.





THE PROGRAM MODEL

THE PROGRAM MODEL

ARTS-n'-MEALS combines:

- Creative arts activities led by a professional Arts in Health practitioner
- Warm meals prepared by Meals on Wheels Central Arizona or partnerships with local restaurants
- Frozen Meal packs provided during pandemic or other emergencies
- Information and referral resources
- Health education materials
- Opportunities for friendship and social connection

Key Partnerships:

- Central Arizona Aging staff
- Community volunteers
- Local host sites
- Arts in Health professional
- Meals on Wheels Central Arizona

Program Goal: Reduce social isolation while improving access to nutrition, resources, and community connections.



SUSTAINABILITY AND EXPANSION

The program launched in 2020 in a single community has now expanded to 4 additional sites, reaching 100 senior monthly.

Program Growth:

- First event: 15 participants, hosted by local Fire Dept
- Arizona City sites now averages 40 participants monthly
- Strong volunteer support and community donations
- Site has become self-sustaining

CAA Expansion to Rural Communities:

- Stanfield
- Mammoth
- Tonto Basin
- Oracle

Average participation:

Approximately 25 older adults per site each month



IMPACT & LESSONS LEARNED



ARTS-n'-MEALS demonstrates that creative partnerships can successfully reach older adults living in underserved rural communities.

Program Impact:

- ✓ Reduced social isolation
- ✓ Increased access to nutritious meals
- ✓ Created meaningful social connections
- ✓ Expanded awareness of available services
- ✓ Encouraged creativity and lifelong learning
- ✓ Built stronger community engagement

Participants gain more than a meal, they gain friendships, purpose, connection, and opportunities to stay active and engaged.

Human connection is essential to healthy aging.

By combining art, nutrition, and community resources, ARTS-n'-MEALS continues to improve the lives of rural older adults across Central Arizona.



Humboldt Senior Resource
Center Nutrition Program

More Than a Meal

Two programs, one truth: every meal is a chance for connection, screening, and referral.





MEALS ON WHEELS REDWOOD COAST

More Than a Meal

Connection

Trusted daily wellness checks — often the only person a participant sees all day.

Screening

Drivers notice changes in health, mobility, cognition, nutrition, and living conditions.

Referral

CalFresh & Medicare counseling, transportation, caregiving, medically tailored meals, PETS, Adult Day Health & PACE.

An early-warning system to catch needs before they become crises.

HERITAGE CAFÉ MOBILE

Meeting Older Adults Where They Are

McKinleyville

Rio Dell

Willow Creek

Reach

Built in partnership with trusted community partners to support older adults where they are.

Receive

Nutritious meals, nutrition education, social connection, resource information, benefits outreach, and referrals.

Result

A trusted touchpoint that surfaces unmet needs and prevents isolation and food insecurity.

Services brought into the community through partnership build trust and reach needs of older adults in the communities of their choice.





THE BOTTOM LINE

Nutrition programs are often seen as food programs — but the meal is really the invitation. The true impact comes from the relationships built around it, and the chance those relationships create to spot needs, offer support, and help older adults stay healthy and independent in their communities.



Questions and Discussion

Please submit your questions or comments through the Q&A.

Empowering Older Adults through Cooking and Nutrition Education

- Moderator: Keri Ann Lipperini, Director of Nutrition and Health Promotion Programs, Administration on Aging, ACL
- Kathleen Miller, Volunteer Program Leader, Northwood Partners
- Rachel Kaplan, Interim Executive Director and Operations Director, Kelly's Kitchen





Tasty Tuesday



- Kathleen Miller, RN
- Volunteer Program Leader
- 218-302-1778
- tastytuesdayely@gmail.com

Grant funded Rural Initiative Collaboration

- **Ely** (population 3228) located in Northeastern Minnesota: a wilderness edge community next to the **Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness**.
- In 2021, a group of local nonprofits collaborated for 3 years to strengthen programs and services **serving older adults** in our city and broader community.
- ***Tasty Tuesday*** was one of the new initiatives that emerged with funding from Northland Foundation based in Duluth MN.



Tasty Tuesday – Key ingredients

Community support: Ely Community Health Center, Northwoods Partners, Ely Senior Center, U of MN.



Vision: Health and nutrition education for older adults

Volunteers: With capacity to lead and sustain the program.

Grant Funding: basic kitchen equipment, marketing, food supplies, printing

Curriculum: SNAP-ED from University of Minnesota Extension Service

Tasty Tuesday inspires palates and conversation



- New tastes and foods sampled in a group setting makes for great conversation starters.
- Use recipes from other US cities and regions around the world.
- Spark new ideas to serve family and friends for the holidays, picnics, gatherings or potlucks (quilting groups and book clubs).
- Simple recipes with some panache are always popular.

Tasty Tuesday shows the economic benefits of cooking at home

- We live in a one grocery store town, where prices are higher, supplies are limited and produce is not always at peak of freshness.
- Information is shared by group members about products and price comparisons inside/outside our community.
- Use what is in your fridge in a creative way.
- Plant based meals are healthy and budget friendly.
- Dining out is expensive in a tourist town with even fewer dining options in the off season.



*Here's our
recipe for
success...*

Start with a tested curriculum for a pilot program. SNAP-ED program

Recruit up to 12 participants for the pilot.

Listen to what they say before and after class. Use evaluations to capture ideas.

Adjust recipes to the participants' taste.

Chef's kiss (Keep It Simple Stupid)!

Tasty Tuesday Format (2021 – present)



Monthly program for up to 24 participants

Participants age range: 60-85.



Ninety Minutes 2:00 – 3:30 pm

Demonstrate 3-4 recipes max!

Provide generous samples to taste in class and send home the leftovers to share with others.



Volunteer driven program

Program leader

Assistant chef or local food expert

Volunteer to track sign ups and send reminders

Culinary assistants: 2-3



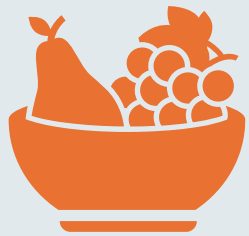
Volunteer Program Leader Role

- Overall responsibility for the program
 - Develop monthly class theme/research and test recipes.
 - Purchase ingredients.
 - Communicate with Executive Director, key staff and volunteers each month.
 - Train volunteers on food safety standards and facility and organization expectations.
 - Maintain Food Safety License.
- Time commitment: approximately 20 hours per month.

Tasty Tuesday classroom set up



Program Planning tips



Nutrition nuggets stimulate group conversation.

Gentle reminders to boost intake of protein, fiber, fruits and vegetables.

Share new science related to adult health.



Preparing 3 recipes within 60-75 minutes is a challenge.

Ingredients or recipe steps may need to be prepped ahead of time.

Use multi cookers to speed up cooking time for soups and stews.

Prebake desserts or breads that need cooling time.



Work within your facility limitations.

Use tabletop hot plates (made for restaurant use).

Stainless steel cart is mobile and makes demonstration easier to see.

Working kitchen may be some distance from the classroom.

Popular class themes

- **Breakfast foods:** Honey whole wheat English muffins, Oatmeal bake, Lemon Ricotta Pancakes, whole grain bagels.
- **Using an Instant Pot**® to make delicious Chicken Noodle soup in an hour
- **Holiday appetizers and desserts:** Charcuterie boards
- **Christmas morning brunch**
- **No knead bread making**
- **How to grow herbs** and bring home herbs to plant.
- **Heirloom squash** (a lecture/demonstration) with extra produce to take home from a horticultural expert.
- Using **garden grown produce** in season: rhubarb, wild blueberries or locally harvested wild rice.



What we have learned from Tasty Tuesday

“Learn to cook – try new recipes, learn from your mistakes, be fearless, and above all have fun.”...

Julia Child

- Recognize that many older adults are tired of cooking (after 50+ years) and out of ideas!
- Many don't consider themselves “cooks”.
- Tasting a recipe *first* builds confidence to try something new.
- Buying unfamiliar ingredients feels like an “risky investment”.
- Praise from family members goes a long way.
- Simple, tasty soups, salads, breads and sweet treats have universal appeal

Tasty Tuesday Budget



Initial investment:

Cooking equipment

Aprons

Marketing



Ongoing Costs:

Food expenditures

Paper goods for serving food

Printing recipes

Volunteer appreciation

Local learning opportunities: Field Trips

- Seasonally, when our volunteer chef is not available, we take “field trips”.
- Take advantage of learning opportunities from local businesses and restaurants.
- Learn about granola and bread baking from Brainstorm Bakery – home of Crapola® granola!
- Learned about pasty making from a local restaurant. Pasties are a traditional local lunch meal for miners that families here embrace.
- Visited a new deli/restaurant to learn from the chefs and taste their menu offerings.



Tasty Tuesday Take Aways

- Cooking is a social activity that brings together a diverse group of people and creates new friendship bonds.
- Storytelling along with cooking adds spice and fun.
- Lifelong learning: exposure to techniques to spark curiosity and rekindle interest in cooking at home and improving nutrition.
- Recipes are guidelines: substituting what is on hand! That's what chefs do too!
- Celebrate creativity and even a failed recipe.
- *Spouses/partners/family members appreciate the class too!*





Questions and Discussion

Please submit your questions or comments through the Q&A.

Join Us Tomorrow, June 24th

- Day 2: Exercise and Physical Activity
 - Preventing Falls and Building Connections: Social connection as a strategy for delivering evidence-based falls prevention programs
 - Move to Connect: Adaptive Movement for Whole-Person Health
 - Assistive Technology Resources to Support Community-Based Exercise



Thank you!

Stay connected with us.

- Visit www.committoconnect.org for key resources.
- Join the [Nationwide Network of Champions](#).
- Contact the CTC team at:
info@committoconnect.org
- Please complete the poll available in the chat.

