

Module 2 Lesson 7

Transcript

I'm sure you're looking at the topic of today's lesson and expecting it to be a total downer. Food security isn't exactly a topic most of us look forward to chatting about but actually this is a really important topic and a completely hopeful area of discussion.

Today we're going to discuss what a food desert is and the effect of food deserts on health and nutrition amongst clients so you can help. I said that this topic is hopeful because it's clear that we, all of us, can serve low income people better when it comes to food and we're actually doing something about it.

Well, in NYC we are and I know the movement is spreading because we've coined terms like food desert. Just a heads up if you haven't heard of a food desert, it's a term we use when we're talking about areas with little to no easy access to healthful foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains and whole foods. They're usually found in low income areas with a lot of people but no grocery stores or not any healthy grocery stores, farmer's markets or access to healthful fare.

I'm thinking of the subsidized housing complexes that take up so many blocks in certain areas of Manhattan. They're surrounded by bodegas and corner stores that sell cheap processed foods and lotto tickets as well as fast food restaurants, but some of the people who live there have to walk well over a mile to get to a real supermarket with healthy food.

I'm thinking of the rundown neighborhoods also that I pass through in LA when I'm there visiting and the corner store I stopped at, wants to buy a bottle of water, actually had a produce area, but it wasn't refrigerated and the tomatoes were bruised, the lettuce was brown and the flies were feasting on the bananas. It was cheaper to buy a bottle of juice than a bottle of water and it's not just an urban areas either. Think of those rural areas where the nearest supermarket is over 10 miles away and these are areas where not everyone has access to a vehicle either. It's hard to get to food. You have the picture.

According to the USDA, 23 and a half million people live in food deserts. 2.1 million people live more than a mile from the nearest supermarket and don't have a car. Low-income zip codes have 30% more convenient stores than middle-income zip codes and people tend to rely on them for their food, their actual food, not just picking up a snack, which is a big part of the obesity problem. Also, people living in the poorest areas have 2.5 times the exposure to fast food restaurants when compared to wealthier areas, are poorer, are sicker, fatter and have less access to

healthful foods. It's a cycle that perpetuates. I know this does sound like a downer, but we're getting to some good stuff.

Studies show people who live in these neighborhoods are 55% less likely to eat a high quality diet compared to those who have access to healthful food and this ultimately affects health, of course. Just one example, so a study found living in a food desert is associated with a higher risk of adverse cardiovascular events. It's really up to you as to how, when and where you want to put your amazing knowledge and efforts to use. This is where the positive stuff comes in and this is where the hope comes in here.

I recommend that you do something, anything. You can come up with a shopping list of inexpensive ingredients, foods and recipes and leave copies in the community you think needs it most. Some of the most healthful foods can even be found at corner stores like dried or canned beans and oats. You can donate your time to a food distribution site like City Harvest, a soup kitchen, food pantry or community-based food donation organization.

They say one-third of food grown is thrown away or wasted. I mean that kills me. You can rescue imperfect produce that would otherwise be wasted from farms. You can offer a cooking demo in your community, church or farmer's market. You can donate money to food rescue organization. The USDA even came up with a food desert map so you can hold a food drive and donate to specific people in need.

Just the fact that we have a map is so promising to me. Again, this is where a little bit of that hope comes in here. The areas without healthful food access are being identified. That's a start. They're being studied. We have efforts in place to end malnutrition in low income areas and I am so hopeful that as [TNSers] we can do our part to turn the tides on food deserts.

So to summarize what we've just learned, food deserts are areas with little to no easy access to healthful foods. 23 and a half million people live in food deserts in the US. People who live in food deserts statistically eat less healthful diets and are at greatest risk for dietary related diseases. But you, you TNSers or is can make an impact on these communities by sharing your knowledge, your skills, your passion, and your resources to help increase access to a healthy diet, to help people live more nutritious lives.

I will see you in the next lesson.