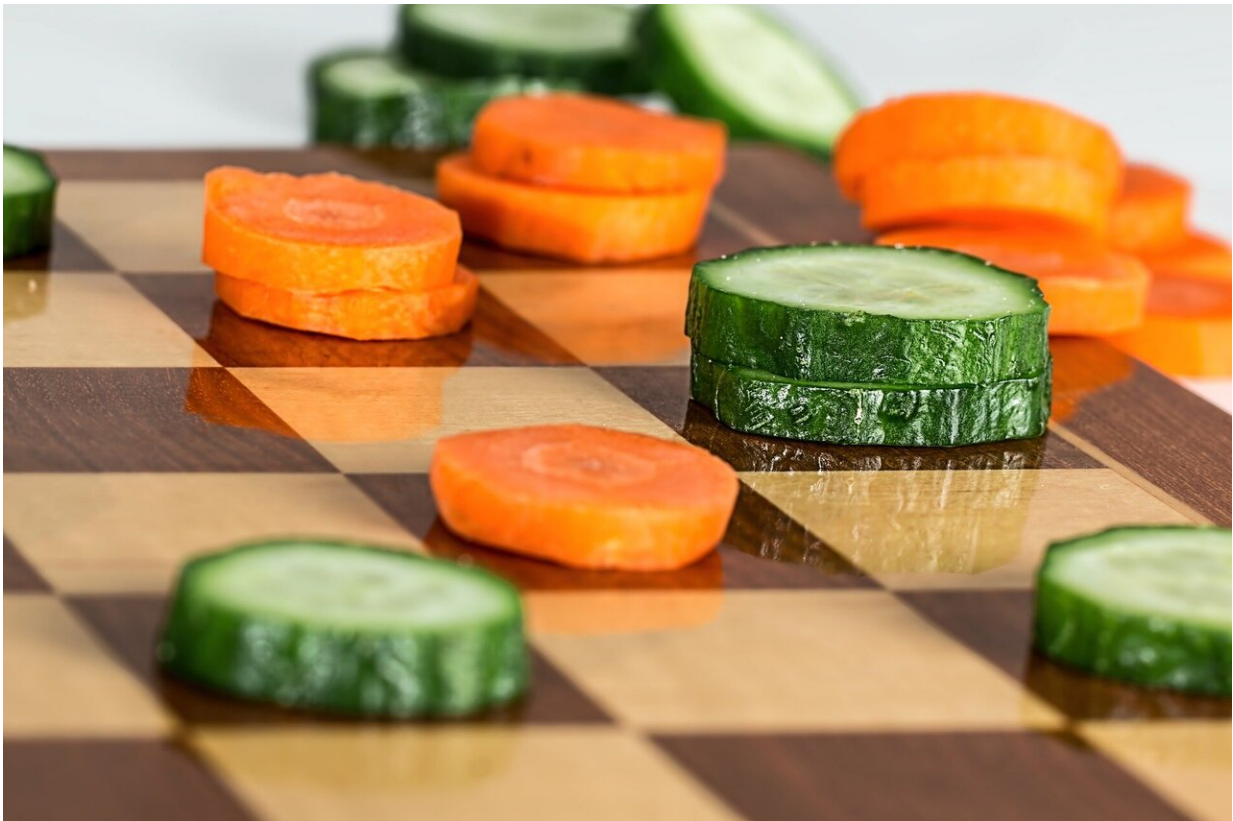


# Promoting patient behavioral change through food choice and self-monitoring

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Teaching patients to observe and document how they feel after eating certain foods can be a highly effective way to encourage positive lifestyle changes, according to Rutgers researchers.

To measure the effectiveness of behavioral change programs on patient well-being, students from the Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy at Rutgers partnered with Eating for Your Health, a New Jersey organization that promotes [healthy eating](#), to conduct a 10-day healthy eating challenge.

"Working with the Eating for Your Health team not only impacted my personal idea of food and lifestyle but transformed my vision for pharmacy and showed me the multidimensional role we play in [health care](#)," said Marta Galagoza, a Rutgers doctoral student in pharmacy and a co-researcher on the project.

Fifty-eight Rutgers health care professionals, staff and students enrolled in the study, representing a variety of healthcare fields, including medicine, dentistry, nursing, [physical therapy](#), [social work](#), nutrition and pharmacy. Participants were shown how to prepare healthy breakfast recipes and asked to observe, document and reflect on how they felt after eating.

These observations, called How You Feel is Data, are a pillar of Eating for Your Health's educational approach, representing the connection between how food affects both the body and brain as an important step toward living a healthier life.

In addition to meal preparation instructions, participants were given nutritional resources, encouragement and a platform to communicate with each other.

After the 10-day challenge, 37 participants completed a survey detailing their experiences and whether their eating habits had changed as a result.

- 86 percent of participants said they were confident that they would change their eating habits moving forward.

- 84 percent said they would eat a wider variety of foods and 46 percent said that they would eat more fiber.
- 62 percent said they planned to prepare food in larger batches and the night before to improve their eating habits.

Typically, health care providers have limited time to engage with patients about lifestyle choices and healthy habits, but Mary Wagner, a Rutgers associate professor in pharmacy and the lead faculty member on the study, sees opportunities for change.

"Pharmacists can create niche spaces in their practices to provide health coaching to patients, but to help patients reverse harmful habits, they first need to figure out what motivates people to change," said Wagner. "Implementing specific tools, such as the How Your Feel is Data method, can allow [health care providers](#) to empower their patients to foster mindful [eating habits](#) and other positive lifestyle changes."

"While [behavior change](#) can be difficult, this study shows that observing, journaling, and self-discovery can support the process and improve the long-term health of patients," said Marion Reinson, executive director of Eating for Your Health. "Experimenting with foods and recipes and listening to and understanding your body's reaction is a self-directed, effective, proactive first step toward discovering a sustainable and stabilizing way of eating that works for you."

Wagner and her students are continuing to work with Eating for Your Health to develop evidence-based curriculums, such as diabetes and bone health, for Rutgers University and other community organizations.

The findings will be presented on Saturday, Oct. 22, in Princeton, New Jersey at the New Jersey Pharmacists Association's annual meeting.

**More information:** Conference: [naspa.us/event/152nd-njpha-ann ...](https://naspa.us/event/152nd-njpha-ann...)

[-meeting-convention/](#)

Provided by Rutgers University

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