



## Diabetes: A Family Matter Homemaker Clubs



### Overview

Years ago women's clubs were the rage! Every community had several. Most every woman belonged to some group that met regularly throughout the year. In the past, homemaker clubs were places where women could enjoy one another's company. Younger and older women joined together to learn crafts and enjoy times together. It was a way older women taught younger ones about parenting, cooking, sewing, canning, flowers, and many other important things. In our busy ways of life, we too often fail to set aside times for these things any more.

Homemaker clubs have also been instrumental in accomplishing tasks in local communities. They have taken roles in policy development and provided leadership for youth activities. They have been involved in securing libraries and seeing that educational opportunities were available. They have honored local heroes and sponsored events to raise funds needed in the community. All across the nation, homemaker clubs have organized women to complete valued tasks. They have used their hands, talents, times, and efforts to make a difference.

The purposes these homemaker clubs served and what was accomplished through them is still be valuable today. Women have many talents that they can enjoy sharing together and teach one another. Back when fewer women worked these community groups served as a social event. As more women went to fulltime employment outside the household, fewer women had

time or need for this form of social interaction. Across the nation, small groups of women continue to meet together regularly. In the Appalachian region and across the nation Cooperative Extension Agents in many counties still assist women to organize homemaker clubs. Perhaps it is time to consider new ways to re-create homemaker clubs in your community! The purpose of these clubs has always been on healthy and active living.

Volunteer *SUGAR Helpers* can be instrumental in starting women's clubs in the community. A cup full of imagination is a great way to get a single group or many local groups formed. While this activity mainly describes things for women, ideas can also be generated about ways to include men and boys. Many activities and roles once viewed as gender related are now things that both men and women or boys and girls enjoy.

### Today's Situation

Young women today are often raised in homes where they are less likely to learn skills such as cooking, sewing, or parenting. These talents seem less honored in today's societies. Yet, as we look around at a constantly changing society, one sees needs to find new ways to meet them. Skills most girls learned growing up in families or in home economic classes are now things many young women lack.

Fewer women know how to cook. Families eat out often, fix prepared foods, and use the microwave instead of the stove top or oven! Many of do not have time to fix the



“from scratch” meals and desserts that our grandmothers made or else we just do not know how to cook. We are often in too big a hurry to cook fresh and healthy foods. We consume large quantities of packaged foods that take little time to fix. But, many of these foods contain unhealthy ingredients and preservatives. Packaged foods with few nutrients have replaced freshly prepared meals. We watch cooking shows on the television and read magazines full of recipes. Yet, we fail to try most of these things in our homes. Our trash is full of boxes, bottles, and cans while most women have little idea about the value of a compost pile.



In the past, most women owned sewing machines and made clothes for most family members. Today few children have worn clothes that were made by mothers or even grandmothers. Many young women have never even sewed a hem or fixed on buttons! Others have never cut something from a pattern. Most young women do not know how to quilt. Buying everything from a store has left many of us unable to do the things women have always done before the last two generations. In fact, much of the heritage that once meant is getting lost in today’s economies.



Today’s smaller families mean that most children grow up today without ever having the responsibility to care for a sibling. Many have never spent much time with an infant or small child. Young girls often have not had the responsibility to tend to a crying baby, change a soiled diaper, or consider the kinds of foods needed by a growing toddler. As young women become parents, many likely discover that they know little about immunizations, childhood illnesses, healthy diets, or parenting skills. In fact,



many young women may have had little instruction or given little thought to being a parent. When it happens, many can be far less prepared than women in the past.



While we may be thankful that we do not have to do all of the things our great-grandparents did, our easy lifestyles are causing us to be unhealthy. We have more and more stress as we strive to do more and more things without considering their value. Materialism or the continuous consumption of goods means that we see most items as replaceable. We are working harder than ever, yet seeming to have less and less for our efforts. Perhaps going back to some of the old ways and reconstructing them in light of today’s needs is a way to get healthy again. Maybe it is time to think about homemaker clubs and discover the roles they can play in increasing health of individuals and families in the Appalachian region.



**Brief Description:**

Homemaker groups can provide times to get together and learn from one another. They can also invite local leaders, artisans, and experts to do training on special topics. Homemaker groups can focus on education that makes a difference! Who will be homemaker club members needs to be decided. Perhaps it will be women in a certain neighborhood or a group of people who already know one another. Whoever is in the group, it is important to be sure that this is a group that shares some common interests and will enjoy being together for a few hours as often as you decide to meet. As groups of women gather together they can set rules for their groups and decide whether formal by-laws or working rules are needed. Decisions about things such as dues, size of membership, and how often to





meet also need to be considered as a group gets started.



What kinds of things can you do for a program? Well, just let your imagination be your guide. Hobbies and special interests are always good ideas. The group might want to decide on a series of programs on a single topic and then move to something else. It should be up to the group to decide. You may want to invite speakers or leaders to learn some new things.



**Participants:**

Homemaker clubs have traditionally been for women. In the past, most club members were married housewives and few worked. Many of the existing clubs today have older women and many with deceased spouses. Today's families have changed. We have many types of families that not only include the traditional ones (married with children), but single never married mothers, divorced and remarried, and many other family forms. Maybe communities need to rethink the way homemaker clubs are formed.



Perhaps some of the clubs need to be mother/daughter groups that are based on age of the child. Having mothers and daughters learn together about ways to be healthy could be a valuable way to spend time together. The shared knowledge and skills gained from the club membership could provide some ways to connect with one another outside the usual parent/child role. Additionally, having two people in the family working together could be a better way to make needed changes in family health routines.



Other ideas about ways to start homemaker clubs might also be useful. For example, having a group for single mothers and one



for stay-at-home moms can provide an outlet away from children. For this kind of club, then a babysitting arrangement might need to be available that is either free or of low cost. A homemakers' club for women struggling to get ahead might be useful to those needing to learn skills that will better prepare them to find a job. Older teenage or young single women that would just like to learn the skills of sewing or cooking might be another group to target. It is possible that there are women in your community that might like to learn to quilt or some other handcraft. Or how about a club that focuses on outdoor adventures? Getting fit is something that can involve the body, mind, and spirit.



While traditional homemaker clubs were aimed at women, in today's world there is nothing to say that a similar form of club cannot be formed for men or boys. In fact, a cooking club would like draw as many men as women! Many women enjoy woodworking, carving, or crafts that once might have been thought of as men's hobbies. Keep in mind that being healthy involves dealing with stress, enjoying meaningful activities, and finding ways to relax. Forming communities through local clubs is something that can have value for all.



Maybe the purpose of the club needs to be the reason for its formation. Groups might need to be called something other than homemakers' clubs. Be creative and let your imagination guide you as you think about ways to create local clubs or groups that can contribute to healthier lives, families, and communities.





### Costs:

A good way to get started is to talk with your local Cooperative Extension Agent about this activity. The agency may already have some funds available that can be used to get some ideas moving along. The local agent might be able to partner with a single or group of volunteer *SUGAR Helpers* to start and sustain local clubs. While some group activities may have some costs, brainstorm to find ways to solve problems and get things started.



### Ideas Linked to Diabetes Prevention and Management:

In many areas of Appalachia, few opportunities exist for persons with diabetes or their families to get the education they need about diabetes. Forming a club around this topic could be a great way to involve volunteer *SUGAR Helpers*. Inviting different health professionals and other community persons could make this a great way to help people get the information they need. Many of the *Toolkit Materials* available on the *Diabetes: A Family Matter* website will be useful for a group such as this. If you decide to create a diabetes-focused club, then you will likely find many of the *Toolkit Activities* of interest to the group.



You might need to decide if the group will be only for persons with diabetes. You might also want to consider starting a club for family members of persons with diabetes. This could help them learn more about the disease and better ways to support one another. Another group to consider would be one that includes pairs, the person with diabetes and their main support person. This would allow the families to learn together about things they



need to know about making family routines healthier.



Here are a few ideas for topics that might be used in these groups.



- Family risks and diabetes prevention
- Handling stress
- Family communication
- Stopping tobacco use
- Managing multiple illnesses
- Asking for the support you need
- Talking to health professionals
- Getting active
- Cooking healthy meals
- Carb counting
- Health insurance
- Medical management of diabetes
- Community resources

### Ideas Linked to Health and Wellness:

A group formed to focus on health and wellness can be a good place for a *SUGAR Helper* to get involved. The group should decide what things they want to learn or work on together. As a *SUGAR Helper*, you can suggest other things related to health and wellness for them to consider. Many of the *Toolkit Activities* available on the *Diabetes: A Family Matter* website will be useful for a group such as this. You will also find links to many websites that may provide much information and many useful ideas.



### Here a few topics to get you started.

- Taking small steps to health
- Cooking for two
- Read and discuss a book together
- Fixing green vegetables
- Getting physically active
- Diabetes prevention and management
- Caregiving tasks





- Stress management



**Other General Ideas to Consider:**

A club could have a single focus, but also aim to have a variety of programs as its focus. Inviting guest speakers or members sharing their own expertise or skills can make for a meaningful way to involve women. Here are just a few ideas that could be of interest.



- Holiday programs
- Manners for a business lunch
- Interview process
- Environmental concerns
- Ways to economize
- Mold and moisture in your home
- Communication with elected officials
- Talking to school teachers
- Using the internet for health concerns



**Some Places to get Additional Information:**



**Cooperative Extension System Offices**

<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/>



This is a nationwide, non-credit educational network. Each U.S. state and territory has a state office at its land-grant university and a network of local or regional offices. These offices are staffed by one or more experts who provide useful, practical, and research-based information to agricultural producers, small business owners, youth, consumers, and others in rural areas and communities of all sizes.



**Final Word:**

If you use this **Homemaker Club Activity** in your community, please be sure to go to the *Diabetes: A Family Matter* website <[www.diabetesfamily.net](http://www.diabetesfamily.net)> and share with



others what worked and what did not work.

A place on the **Communicate Section** of the website will be available for sharing your ideas. If you have a website that pertains to this activity, please post the link to the website so that others can take a look.

