

VA Manchester is sizzling this summer with healthy grilling techniques

MANCHESTER, N.H. – Slicing and dicing took center stage for Veterans enrolled in VA Manchester health care as they were entertained and educated on July 22, 2024, with a table full of fresh ingredients, sunshine brightening the medical center backdrop, and the scent of summer—a fired-up grill.

Also fired-up were the Healthy Teaching Kitchen (HTK) program registered dietitians and participating Veterans attending the grilling cooking class.

“I came to try out the food,” said Lucille Downey, an Air Force Veteran enrolled at VA Manchester. “I am not a cook, so this gives me a chance to try it and see what it is supposed to taste like and everything. And, to socialize.”

The HTK program offers Veterans nutrition knowledge, cooking skills, healthy meal planning ideas, and recipes to build confidence in making healthy food choices.

“They are keeping me healthy and hopefully lose weight,” added Downey.

This summer, the Nutrition and Food Services team decided to expand its HTK classes by adding a grilling series to their class schedule.

“I think one of the biggest benefits to this program, and this is something I am personally really passionate about, is that just because food is healthy doesn’t mean it can’t be fun,” shared Registered Dietitian Samantha Daily-Malysa and co-host for the cooking class.

Registered Dietitian Rebecca Normandeau greeted participants and displayed her cooking techniques for the class. She prepped the food station and engaged with participants joining virtually through VA Video Connect (VVC), and those who joined the class in-person.

“Everyone really seems to enjoy it and they are happy to get back together face-to-face,” shared Normandeau.

Army Veteran David Peterson, who has been choosing VA since 1986, joined the class to improve his health and well-being.

“I was a cook in the Army,” shared Peterson. “I am trying to lose a little weight and [they are] giving me ideas of what to do.”

He said it can be challenging cooking for one, and the HTK cooking classes provide him with an opportunity to ask questions and rework the recipe, helping him to avoid always buying different spices for his meal planning.

“Hearing it and getting advice from the cooks is what brought me out here. I enjoy it. If I didn’t have these places to go to, I would be in the house ... I got to get out and meet people.”

The in-person cooking classes are a crowd favorite among Veterans enhancing their knowledge for better food choices, and for the social connectedness.

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“You know, one of the things I always tell people is everyone eats, so everyone has something to gain from it,” said Daily-Malysa. “I know some of the Veterans have hung out after the class, they’ve exchanged emails, and it is really a good opportunity for people to socialize while also learning something healthy and something new, so I think it works out really well.”

The registered dietitians selected two of the recipes for the grilling class, consisting of grilled pineapple with cilantro-lime dressing and grilled portobella mushrooms.

“Our recipe selection process can get quite fun for us,” shared Daily-Malysa.

“We actually have a nutrition website with a recipe database through the VA. Often times we will take some of our recipes from there, other times if we are not seeing the type of recipe that we are feeling or that kind of thing, we will do a little bit of research on our own. We have a recipe template that we can put our own recipes in and make adjustments to it.”

The third recipe showcased was a recommendation from a Veteran for grilled corn on the cob, but of course the NFS team had fun with it adding a twist—grilled corn with chili-lime butter and cotija cheese.

“I hear a lot of people concerned that healthy food is like rabbit food or it’s boring, or they can’t eat the same foods that they enjoy if they are trying to eat healthy, so I think the biggest purpose of this class is how can you be a little creative and experimental and find ways to make food healthy and taste just as good as the stuff that might not be as healthy,” shared Daily-Malysa.

Normandeau echoed the importance of the HTK classes and of course, with the perfect recipe for success.

“Eating healthy and finding simple ways to cook at home and make healthy foods taste good and enjoying it all throughout the year.”

For more nutritious recipes or to learn more about healthy meal planning, browse the [Recipes, Cookbooks, and Cooking Videos - Nutrition and Food Services \(va.gov\)](#) or reach out to VA Manchester at (603) 624-4366 extension 6407.

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Registered Dietitian Rebecca Normandeau greets Veterans and family members at the solarium outdoor garden area and via VA Video Connect (VVC) at the start of the Healthy Teaching Kitchen grilling class on July 22, 2024, located at the Manchester VA Medical Center, N.H. (VA Manchester/Lori Flynn)



Registered Dietitians Rebecca Normandeau (L, standing) and Samantha Daily-Malysa (R, standing) co-host a Healthy Teaching Kitchen grilling class held July 22, 2024, for Veterans and family members to help educate and build confidence with healthy meal planning and preparation at the Manchester VA Medical Center, N.H. (VA Manchester/Lori Flynn)



U.S. Air Force Veteran Lucille Downey tastes grilled corn with chili-lime butter and cotija cheese prepared during the Healthy Teaching Kitchen grilling class held July 22, 2024, at the Manchester VA Medical Center, Manchester, N.H. (VA Manchester/Lori Flynn)