



# Nutrition for Family Living

Susan Nitzke, Nutrition Specialist; [susan.nitzke@ces.uwex.edu](mailto:susan.nitzke@ces.uwex.edu)  
Sherry Tanumihardjo, Nutrition Specialist; [sherry.tan@ces.uwex.edu](mailto:sherry.tan@ces.uwex.edu)  
Amy Rettammel, Outreach Specialist; [arettamm@facstaff.wisc.edu](mailto:arettamm@facstaff.wisc.edu)  
Betsy Kelley, Outreach Specialist; [kelly@nutrisci.wisc.edu](mailto:kelly@nutrisci.wisc.edu)

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## March, 2002 Topics

Environmental and policy determinants of physical activity in the United States

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## Environmental and policy determinants of physical activity in the United States

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A study reported in the American Journal of Public Health looked at factors in the environment and in people's social systems that encourage or prevent them from getting regular physical activity.

A telephone survey was conducted with 1,818 individuals throughout the country. The sample was chosen so that approximately 40% of participants had household incomes of less than \$20,000/year. The study showed that:

- Men reported more available places for physical activity than women.
- Lower-income groups had less access to both indoor and outdoor places for physical activity than higher-income groups.
- Lower-income women reported less access to walking trails, parks, and equipment such as treadmills than higher-income women. In contrast, lower-income men reported greater access to those things.

Those who participated in physical activity reported doing so on neighborhood streets, at shopping malls, at parks, on walking/jogging trails, on treadmills and at indoor gyms. Participants who were physically active also lived in neighborhoods with sidewalks, enjoyable scenery, heavy traffic, and hills. They found support from surroundings where many people were exercising, had friends who encouraged exercise, and had at least one friend to exercise with.

The four most common personal barriers for men and women of all income groups were lack of time, feeling too tired, getting enough physical activity at work, and no motivation to be physically active. People who were less physically active reported the following additional barriers: poor health, lack of energy, and not liking physical activity.

Overall, access variables (such as places to exercise) and neighborhood variables (such as enjoyable scenery) were more important to women than men. The greatest personal barrier for women was lack of energy, and for men was poor health.

The participants in this survey believed that employers should provide time during the work day for physical activity, and they strongly supported requiring physical education in schools. There was strong support for government funding for areas such as parks, walking trails and bike paths to encourage physical activity.

Implications for educators: people may want to be more physically active, but environmental factors often get in the way. Understanding how environmental and social factors influence people's ability to be physically active can help in educating for individual behavior change. Changes in the social environment can help support changes in individuals, and the support of



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individuals is necessary for making changes in the environment. This study can give us some insight into which environmental changes we might want to encourage in our communities to make physical activity easier for everyone.

For more information on physical activity in communities: Resources for physical activity, in the December 2001 Nutrition for Family Living.

Brownson RC et al. Environmental and policy determinants of physical activity in the United States. *Am J Public Health.* 2001;91:1995-2003.



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### Resources: Food Stamp Nutrition Connection

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This new web site is intended to provide access to Food Stamp Program nutrition resources. Educators nationwide can use this site to identify curricula, lesson plans, research, training tools, and participant materials. The site is still under development, so bookmark the site and check back often. [www.nal.usda.gov/foodstamp](http://www.nal.usda.gov/foodstamp)

BK's comment: This site is easy to navigate and has lots of great stuff. You'll have to do a lot less "sifting" than many sites because the resources are chosen specifically for food stamp recipients and low income audiences.

Also remember that our own, recently-reorganized "Teaching" page on the WNEP website contains resources that have been reviewed by county and state colleagues in Wisconsin. The revised page now allows you to look up resources by audience, by topic, and by language. As we review and find materials from the national site that are particularly appropriate for Wisconsin program guidelines and delivery, we will include them in the WNEP database, which can be found at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/wnep/p6/index.html>

### Resources: Food Labels

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This quiz is designed to be fun and easy to navigate, but even experienced food label users will find some challenges. Its main purpose is to provide an entertaining way for consumers to learn how to use a food label. In the future there will be a non-interactive version that can be easily printed out. It can be found at <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/flquiz1.html>

A more comprehensive tool for teaching about food labels is FDA's "Guidance on how to understand and use the Nutrition Facts Label." It can be found at <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/foodlab.html>.

BK comment: Take the food label quiz yourself to test your knowledge, then read through the other document to refresh your memory on everything else you need to know about food labels. The "Guidance" document will print nicely if you choose the pdf version.



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### Resources: Tips for the Savvy Supplement User

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For educators and consumers: The FDA has a new consumer information piece called “Tips for the Savvy Supplement User: Making Informed Decisions and Evaluating Information.” It is available on the FDA’s dietary supplement website at [www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/ds-savvy.html](http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/ds-savvy.html)

This piece was developed to help consumers sort out information on dietary supplements by providing points to consider, questions to ask health professionals, suggestions for searching the web and evaluating research, and ways to check common assumptions. It is a good complement to Extension’s bulletin on Dietary Supplements (publication No 582, available through Extension Publications [www1.uwex.edu/ces/pubs/](http://www1.uwex.edu/ces/pubs/)) You can also view (but not print) this bulletin directly: [www1.uwex.edu/ces/pubs/pdf/NCR582.PDF](http://www1.uwex.edu/ces/pubs/pdf/NCR582.PDF)

For educators: If you want to do more reading on evaluating nutrition information, the American Dietetic Association has recently published a position paper on Food and Nutrition Misinformation. It can be found at <http://www.eatright.org/adar0202.html>

BK comment: I especially liked the resources about evaluating medical and dietary information on the web that are listed at the end of the FDA piece.