



Nutrition for Family Living

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November, 2003 Topics

Preventing overweight in young children: Fit WIC

Exercise for elders: It's never too late

Exploring food purchase behavior of low-income households: How do they economize?

School Breakfast: Background and Resources

Preventing overweight in young children: Fit WIC

Many Extension educators partner with WIC to provide secondary education. This report from the Fit WIC project includes some important lessons learned and recommendations for working with WIC participants, and other low-income parents of young children, about the issue of childhood obesity. For more information about Fit WIC, see their website:

http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Sharing_Center/statedev_FIT.html

Fit WIC Project Background

In 1998, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) funded a childhood obesity prevention initiative called Fit WIC. The purpose of this initiative was to examine how the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) could better respond to the issue of childhood obesity. The USDA recognized that WIC has widespread access to the population of young low-income children that is at greatest risk for obesity, and that reaching very young children is critical to any prevention strategy.

Implementation Manual

The Fit WIC implementation manual contains the experiences of the five Fit WIC Project Teams, their procedures, requirements, problems experienced, suggested solutions, outcomes, lessons learned and recommendations. The manual presents five intervention programs that can be implemented in a WIC agency or in other community agencies directed toward the prevention of overweight in young children.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Action

While developing these programs, the five Project Teams learned important lessons about what worked and what didn't work in their respective settings. On the bases of their common experiences and their qualitative research, the Project Teams compiled the following list of lessons learned and recommendations for action.

Lesson Learned #1: Many parents of overweight children did not perceive their child as overweight or did not feel that their child's weight was a problem. Parents were not motivated to solve an unseen problem.



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Recommendation: Change the focus of participant education from weight to healthy lifestyle. Discussions that focus specifically on weight are not likely to be productive. When the discussion focuses on health behaviors of the entire family, nutrition education is likely to be more effective and the entire family will benefit.

Lesson Learned #2: Parents were eager to receive in-depth, how-to information on healthy lifestyle choices, even if they weren't concerned about their child's weight. They especially wanted activities that involved the entire family.

Recommendation: Weave practical, how-to information and skill building activities into every aspect of education. The approaches below are well received by both participants and staff:

- Conduct group discussions with parents, facilitated by staff, to help parents identify and share solutions to their common problems.
- Engage parents and children in planned, skill-building activities focusing, for example, on physical activity, cooking, or meal planning.
- Provide specific suggestions for activities parents can do at home with their children.

Lesson Learned #3: WIC staff were uncomfortable talking about weight issues with participants.

Recommendation: Encourage staff to take a learner-centered approach:

- Assess what participants know and what they would like to learn. Involve parents and children in active learning.
- Focus nutrition education on parent skills to improve the feeding relationship and child eating behaviors.
- Educate parents about the importance of role modeling.
- Ensure that educational materials are behaviorally focused, easy to read, and meet participants' needs.

Lesson Learned #4: Staff felt they could be more effective educators when they could provide positive modeling of healthy behaviors.

Recommendation: Provide wellness opportunities for staff and encourage them to become involved in these efforts.

Lesson Learned #5: Promoting physical activity as part of nutrition education was well received by WIC parents, children, and staff.

Recommendation: The concept of balancing physical activity with energy intake is integral to nutrition education; promoting physical activity will enhance nutrition education. Staff can facilitate physical activity among participants by providing referrals and coordinating with community agencies that offer activity opportunities.

Lesson Learned #6: Community groups were ready and able to participate in community-wide efforts to prevent childhood overweight.

Recommendation: Establish partnerships with community agencies to develop comprehensive, community-wide interventions. Community partnerships increase the likelihood that participants will receive consistent messages from various sources, thus increasing the impact of WIC's efforts.



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Exercise for elders: It's never too late

Older Americans need more motivation to get regular physical activity, say a series of studies published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine.

The following advice is compiled from the issue:

- Messages for seniors need to move beyond a focus on basic health benefits, and focus on encouraging and inspiring audience members to get moving, while being careful not to alienate or turn them off.
- Older adults receive as much benefit from physical activity, or any healthy behavior, as younger people. It's never too late to get benefit from physical activity.
- Social and behavioral factors, like diet and exercise, play the most important role in determining longevity and quality of life among older adults. Genetics contributes only about 25% to human longevity.
- Older adults won't be motivated by stern lectures to "get off the couch," or images of exercise as hard, sweaty, physical labor.
- Audiences want specific directions and guidance. Instead of vaguely suggesting "walk more," try "get your heart rate up, at least 30 minutes a day, at least 5 days/week."
- Older people say they look for activities that are moderate in intensity, reasonably inexpensive, simple and convenient, and for older women especially, include opportunities to socialize.
- Barriers to being more active include unsafe streets, absent sidewalks, nasty winters or hot summers. Fear of injury, lack of time, energy, or motivation also factor in.
- Doctors should be advocates of physical activity. The standard recommendation to see a doctor before starting an exercise program can be a barrier for some people.
- The "start low and go slow" approach is good advice for older adults becoming more active.

WNEP's "Physical Activity Jeopardy for Older Adults" addresses a number of the points summarized above. You can find a description of the lesson as well as a direct link to download the lesson at http://cf.uwex.edu/ces/wnep/tch_res/res_detail.cfm?resource_id=223

Am J Prev Med 2003;25(3sii). Physical activity: preventing physical disablement in older adults



Exploring food purchase behavior of low-income households: How do they economize?

This report by USDA's Economic Research Service compares food purchases by US households of different income levels and finds that low-income shoppers spend less on food purchases despite some evidence that they face generally higher purchase prices. Food purchase decisions often involve trade offs among taste, preference, and quality factors to meet spending constraints. Low-income shoppers can stretch their food dollars in a number of ways. Understanding food choices and buying decisions of low-income shoppers is essential to providing relevant nutrition education messages.

Researchers compared households of different income levels on four shopping practices:

- Buying a greater proportion of discounted products
- Buying store brand or generic products
- Taking advantage of volume discounts by buying larger packages
- Buying a less expensive product within a product class (for example, lower grade cuts of meat, or bananas instead of berries).

Using data collected from 40,000 US households, the researchers found that shoppers tended to do some of these practices more often than others. Low-income shoppers bought more items on sale and chose store brand products more often. They also substituted less expensive cuts of meat, or types of fruit or vegetable, for more expensive choices. They did not, however, buy larger package sizes. This may be due to transportation constraints, budget constraints, or storage constraints.

The authors comment that the money saving practices of low-income households are likely to be influenced by the types of food stores available to them. Smaller stores found in rural or inner-city areas may not offer store brands or large package sizes. Despite higher prices at smaller stores, low-income families spend less per capita than higher-income families. The challenge for families – and for educators – is to combine money saving strategies with nutritious food choices.

WNEP's Money for Food curriculum is designed to help families explore money-saving strategies for food shopping and preparation. It is also designed to connect families to resources that can help them stretch their food dollars. The curriculum is online at

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/wnep/p6/mff/>

Exploring food purchase behavior of low-income households: How do they economize? Economic Research Service. *Current Issues in Economics of Food Markets*. Agriculture Information Bulletin No 747-07, June 2003.

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aib747/aib74707.pdf>



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School Breakfast: Background and Resources

On October 17, 2003, Governor Doyle announced an initiative to increase availability of breakfast in Wisconsin schools. This proposal has sparked discussion and triggered passionate debates on the value of breakfast and the proper role of parents and schools in providing a morning meal. Nutrition educators can take advantage of current interest to reaffirm/clarify the value of breakfast for children. With that in mind, Susan Nitzke and Jo Futrell have prepared a Family Living press release on this topic for November 2003 (archived at <http://cf.uwex.edu/ces/news/newrelease.cfm>).

The USDA school breakfast program provides reimbursement and resources to help schools offer free and reduced price breakfasts for students. Nationwide, of the schools that offer lunch, 78 percent of them also offer school breakfast. Last year, 20 states had school participation rates of over 90 percent. Only nine states had school participation rates below 60 percent. Although Wisconsin's participation rates have increased dramatically in the past year, Wisconsin was at 44 percent - making the state 50th in the nation. A fact sheet on the school breakfast program is available from the USDA Food and Nutrition Services website: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/AboutBFast/bfastfacts.htm>.

Governor Doyle's press release on school breakfast can be viewed at: http://www.wisgov.state.wi.us/pressreleases_detail.asp?prid=278

A past issue of the Nutrition for Family Living e-newsletter has an article summarizing a study on "School breakfast and academic achievement" Feb. 2001:

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/wnep/p3/mmpdfs/0102.pdf>

The importance of breakfast is also summarized in a new document on "What's Right for Kids: Improving the School Nutrition Environment" from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (see page 2 at <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dltcl/bbfcsp/tn.html>).

A study of a pilot school breakfast program in Minnesota (Wahlstrom and Begalle. *Topics Clin Nutr.* 1999; 15:17-29) compared data from six schools that served breakfast and three schools that did not. They observed better concentration, increased alertness and energy, a decrease in stomach aches and headaches, and fewer discipline problems, and a general increase in math and reading scores for the students in schools with a breakfast program for all students.

An article that compared three studies on breakfast and cognition (Benton and Parker. *Am J Clin Nutr.* 1998; 67:772S-778S) reported breakfast helps some aspects of memory (word list recall and memory while counting backwards), possibly by increasing blood glucose levels.

Teaching materials for a "What's for Breakfast?" display are available on the Wisconsin Nutrition Education Network website: <http://www.nutrisci.wisc.edu/nutrinet/JJ%20materials.htm> and a WNEP fact sheet on "Eat Breakfast!" is available at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/wnep/p6/nfspdfs/Brkfast.pdf>.



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Quick and easy breakfast ideas are listed below (from the Children's Nutrition Research Center at Baylor University, <http://www.bcm.tmc.edu/cnrc/consumer/archives/breakfast-fuel.htm>).

- Blender-quick fruit smoothies made with yogurt and fresh or canned fruit
- Cheese and crackers or melted cheese on whole-grain toast with 100% juice
- Low-fat yogurt with added fruit and low-fat granola cereal topping
- Instant breakfast mixed with low-fat milk and fresh fruit
- Fortified cereal with low-fat milk and 100% citrus juice
- Peanut butter rolled inside a tortilla with 100% fruit juice
- Cold slice of pizza with low-fat milk
- Left-over macaroni and cheese and 100% fruit juice
- Low-fat waffle, sliced fruit and low-fat milk
- Breakfast burritos and other frozen entrees, on occasion
- Parents are advised to read labels carefully to select breakfast foods that contribute to a nourishing breakfast.