



Healthlink

A publication by the Women, Infants & Children (WIC) Program
Chester County, Pennsylvania.

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"Good Nutrition Today For A Healthier Tomorrow"

November 2009

Adolescent Vegetarianism - Fad or Food Disorder?



Research suggests that vegetarianism can be a healthful way to increase dietary intake of fruits and vegetables. The potential benefit for individuals to decrease their risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension and some cancers is one

of several motivators noted in the July 2009 issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. The study pointed out that while adult vegetarians are mostly concerned about health benefits, adolescents and young adults may have different motivating factors.

The most common reason adolescents gave for choosing vegetarianism was to lose or not gain weight; furthermore, female vegetarians were far more likely than non-vegetarians to report dieting to lose weight. Most are aware of the possible nutrient deficiencies including B-12, calcium, vitamin D, riboflavin, protein, zinc, and n-3 fatty acids in a poorly planned vegetarian diet. However, more recently a consistent pattern linking vegetarianism and food disorders has surfaced. Studies have shown that adolescents who have symptoms of eating disorders may adopt a vegetarian diet as a weight-loss method because it is a socially acceptable way to avoid eating certain foods.



Is a vegetarian diet associated with a lower body weight? Among young adults, vegetarians were less likely than non-vegetarians to be

overweight or obese, studies have concluded that body mass index of adult vegetarians can range from 3% to 20% lower than that of non-vegetarians. However, adolescent findings consistently show no statistically

significant differences in weight status when comparing vegetarians to non-vegetarians.

Studies show that on average both adolescent and young adult vegetarians consume diets lower in fat and higher in fiber, such as fruits and vegetables. However, perhaps due to the heightened awareness of food intake and restrictions of certain foods, studies suggest that young



adults and adolescent vegetarians are at greater risk for engaging in binge eating than adult vegetarians or the general public. Binge eating is the behavior of

uncontrollably consuming large quantities of food in a short period of time. Similarly, younger vegetarians were more likely to engage in unhealthy weight-control behaviors such as fasting, and the use of laxatives, diuretics and diet pills. Together these findings suggest that adolescent vegetarians may be at greater risk for eating disorders.



Do the health benefits of vegetarianism outweigh potential for food disorders? Studies

indicate that it would be beneficial for clinicians to ask adolescents and young adults about their vegetarian status. It may be prudent to investigate an individual's motive for choosing a vegetarian diet. Adolescence is a time of experimentation and developmental change. There is a heightened awareness of their appearance, and temptation to conform to a cultural ideal. The high water and fiber content in a well planned vegetarian diet may be instrumental in obesity prevention, by reducing calorie intake and increased satiety. If a vegetarian lifestyle is chosen encouraging health and wellness and consuming plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes may lay the foundation for a life long pattern of good health.

NEW FOODS for WIC

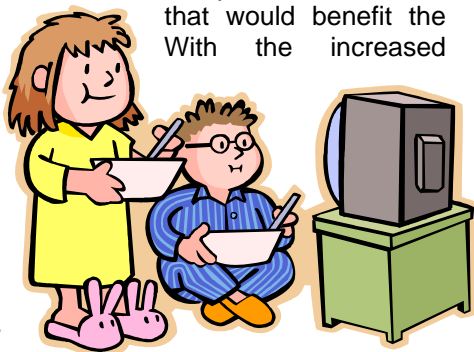
Check out this update!



Beginning on October 1, 2009, WIC programs across the United States initiated changes to the foods provided to our pregnant, breast feeding, postpartum women, infants, and children until their 5th birthday. **The first major changes to the food package**

for over 30 years, the new vouchers appear to be very popular with our Chester County WIC families!

The changes were brought about through a long and detailed government examination of the foods WIC provides. The Institute of Medicine, an independent body concerned with the health of Americans, was asked by Congress to assess the nutrient make-up of the WIC foods and suggest changes that would benefit the WIC population. With the increased incidence of heart disease, cancers, obesity - among American children as well as adults, and more sedentary lifestyles, the IOM tackled the changes needed for WIC foods.



The changes were then approved by Congress and WIC programs were given until October 1st to update their computer systems, train their staff members, educate grocery store employees of the changes, and begin to offer them to participants. It has been a long road, but with an exciting finish.

What we are hearing in Chester County from our WIC families is excitement about the new food packages!

Children above the age of 2 and all women receive less milk and only low-fat milk. Their checks have less cheese than before to lower the amount of saturated fat in WIC foods. And soy foods have been added for women to choose from if they wish. Children with allergy issues may have soy foods, with their doctor's recommendation, to replace the dairy foods they can't eat. Several families have been really happy with that change.



In place of the dollar value lost in milk and cheese, women and children receive whole grains each month. In our state they get to

choose from whole grain breads and rolls, whole wheat or corn tortillas, brown rice, or oats (for breastfeeding moms.)

The amount of juice has been lowered for women and children and eliminated for infants each month. This means less sugar in their diets through sugary beverages.

But don't worry about the vitamins and minerals lost through less juice, because all WIC participants will now receive checks for fruits and vegetables each month. **Without a doubt, this is the most popular change in our new food vouchers and has created many smiles among our WIC families.** We all know that fresh fruits and vegetables are expensive and sometimes out of reach for struggling families. Our children now get a check for \$6.00/month for fresh, canned, or frozen produce; pregnant women receive \$8.00/month while fully breastfeeding moms get \$10.00/month. Infants will begin to receive 4 ounce infant fruits and vegetables at the recommended age of 6 months.

In order to encourage moms to fully breastfeed their infants, the new food vouchers for breastfeeding women are the largest checks given. Fully breastfed infants also receive infant meats in addition to fruits and vegetables at 6 months of age. To allow moms and babies to get breastfeeding started in the first month after birth, formula supplementation is not permitted, and moms are offered a breastpump if they need one. Chester County WIC currently leads the state in the initiation of breastfeeding with 65% of our moms nursing their babies.

The WIC vouchers still include cereal for everyone and eggs for women and children from the time they turn one year of age. Additional protein is provided to families with the choice of canned beans, dried beans, or peanut butter. We are excited at WIC to have new foods for our participants and have been pleased to see the reaction of the families we serve. **Healthier food choices throughout life do make a difference and need to start with pregnancy – this is what WIC is all about!**



Chester County WIC is serving more than 5,400 participants each month.

WIC is an equal opportunity employer and provider.