



ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES  
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December 12, 2003

Patricia Daniels, Director  
Supplemental Food Programs Division  
Food and Nutrition Service, USDA  
3101 Park Center Drive – Rm 520  
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Ms. Patricia Daniels:

Enclosed you will find comments on the revisions to the WIC Food Packages. Thank you for the consideration.

Sincerely,

Risa J. Jasiow, M.S. R.D.  
ACS/Head Start Nutrition Coordinator

Enclosure

received  
DEC 15 2003

## Revisions to the WIC Food Packages

The **Administration for Children Services (ACS) Head Start** grantee oversees services for approximately 18,000 low income preschool age (3-5) children and their families in New York City. In program year 2002-2003 43% of the ACS/Head Start families that were served were enrolled and receiving benefits under the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children.

During the hours that children are in Head Start they receive 1/3 up to 2/3 of their total nutritional needs. For those Head Start children who are receiving the benefits afforded to them through their local WIC programs they truly benefit from the nutrients provided to them through WIC food packages.

From that perspective, the **Administration for Children Services (ACS) Head Start** submits the following comments for consideration in the revision of the WIC Food Packages.

1. Include fruits and vegetables in the WIC food package for women and children. By including fruits and vegetables WIC participants will have the opportunity to meet the minimum 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day as recommended in The Food Guide Pyramid and promoted by the National 5 A Day Partnership. Including fruits and vegetables will allow participants to choose a variety of food sources high in key vitamins and minerals, such as Vitamin C, Vitamin A, magnesium and folic acid.

Currently, juice is providing some of these key nutrients but at a caloric cost. By including fruits and vegetables the participant will be able to choose nutrient dense foods that are higher in fiber and lower in calories.

As part of the New York State Farmers Market Program WIC participants enrolled in WIC programs in communities with participating farmers markets receive a one time benefit of \$24.00 to be used at farmers markets and are valid from July through November. This is an excellent program but not all WIC participants have access to this program and these benefits are not available to participants throughout the year. All WIC participants should have an opportunity obtain fruits and vegetables throughout the year.

The inclusion of fruits and vegetables may also address the issue of the increasing number of children who are overweight/obese in this country as well as in New York City (21% of children in kindergarten). As mentioned above fruits and vegetables will provide nutrient dense lower calorie food choices as compared to juice. This is not saying that juice does not play an important role in the nutrient contribution of the WIC participant but there needs to be more consideration as to the vitamins and minerals certain types of juice contain (Apple Juice unless fortified is not a good source of Vitamin C) and the age and weight status of the participant (child or women). That is if a child is overweight the WIC package should tailored to include fruits and vegetables instead of juice.

Since fruits and vegetables are dependant on season and local availability the WIC food package may include categories of food based on nutrient content and would be inclusive of selections of fruits and vegetables that consider seasonal and availability and can include fruits and vegetables that are consumed and familiar to different cultures.

There is an overall need to increase fruit and vegetable consumption in New York City. In a New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene 2002 survey 14% of adults in New York City report not eating any fruits and vegetables the previous day. In the New York State Department of Health Eat Well/Play Hard Survey the WIC participants surveyed reported that 83% of children consumed less than 3 servings of vegetables a day and 19.6% consumed less than 2 servings of fruits a day (excluding juice)

It is also hoped that the inclusion of fruits and vegetables into WIC Food Packages may encourage local stores which accept WIC checks and are located in low income areas to carry more fruits and vegetables for their clientele. The issue of access to nutritious foods is a concern of Head Start families in New York City, as indicated through focus groups with Head Start parents. This revision to the WIC food package may have a trickle down effect in improving availability of fruits and vegetables in communities which Head Start serve.

2. For children and adults that may be allergic to the protein or lactose in milk a substitution of a viable calcium source such as fortified Soy Milk. This substitution should also be allowed for those women and children that may not consume dairy for cultural reasons.
3. Ethnic/cultural foods freedom at local programs should be considered. To ensure that WIC participants have more opportunity to choose foods that are culturally appropriate there should be allowance at local WIC programs to include foods that are more culturally acceptable. This determination should be based on the ethnicity of the individual WIC participants with consideration of nutrient value and cost of the food. A definition can be set to determine nutrient criteria for substituted ethnic foods and the local program, with state assistance, can generate a list based on these criteria and cost consideration. For example, a WIC participant can opt to choose a cereal or another whole grain food product that is culturally appropriate and nutritional comparable to the substituted food. These lists of acceptable ethnic foods would be inclusive of all the cultures served in that particular community.
4. In the revision of the WIC food packages attention should be given so that these changes are more in conjunction with other federal recommendations such as the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Food Guide Pyramid. There also should be consideration regarding the supplemental aspect of WIC foods in relation to other federally funded food and nutrition programs, such as the United States Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Care Food Program.
5. To offset the costs that may ensue due to the above recommendations it may be considered to modify the quantities of foods provided to children 1-5 years old since they currently receive food packages with similar quantities of food as adults. Since children of this age do not require the same quantity of food as adults it may be prudent to reduce the quantities of food provided to this age group but with consideration so that the type and quantity of food that is provided helps to meet their nutritional needs.

## **References**

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