

NUTRI-NET NEWS

October 1998

MEDIA MATTERS

This newsletter is a service of the Nutrition Education Network of Wisconsin, funded by a grant from the Food Stamp Program, Food and Nutrition Service, United States Department of Agriculture, and administered through the University of Wisconsin-Madison. It is designed to enhance coordination and communication among agencies and organizations that educate Wisconsin's low income individuals and families about nutrition and food. *Nutri-Net News* shares brief information about programs and materials that support healthful and enjoyable eating.

Social Support and Dietary Change in a Low-Income Population

The authors of an article in *Health Education Research* (Vol.11, no.3, pages 383-395) examined the relationship between social support and dietary change in a rural, southern, low-income, adult population. They developed a social support for dietary change measure for a hypercholesterolemic population and tested its predictive usefulness in a clinical trial with a dietary intervention. Questions were administered by telephone to 443 patients enrolled in the trial. Dietary change was measured by the Dietary Risk Assessment. Major findings from the study are highlighted below:

- Motivation to change the diet was significantly related to actual dietary improvement; i.e., for those with increased motivation levels for changing their diets, there is a greater chance that they will actually make positive changes. **This was especially true for men.**
- There was a significant interaction of motivation with friend support. This indicates that when there is a high level of both motivation to change and friend sup-

port, the effects on dietary change are even greater than when only motivation level is high. **This was especially true for women.**

- Both men and women were more likely to rely on women rather than men for their primary source of support.
- Negative support from one's network (e.g., "sabotaging") did not significantly inhibit dietary change in this study, although other studies have shown an effect of negative social environment on adherence to diets.

The results of the study suggest that, for women, support from friends should be emphasized. Those attempting dietary change should be encouraged to identify who in their circle of friends would be

Subscription Information

Nutri-Net News is published quarterly. It can be sent to you by mail or e-mail.

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supportive of their efforts and to use these friends as much as possible. In addition, systems for strengthening friend support within the dietary program could be developed (e.g., a buddy system with weekly telephone calls, group pot luck meals, meetings for recipe exchanges and regular group sharing sessions.) However, the authors cautioned that it is unclear whether support from such “artificial” systems would prove as helpful as one’s natural support network. It may be better to offer dietary interventions through existing social systems, e.g., churches and other community organizations.

For men, the authors recommended it may be more important to determine their level of motivation for a particular health behavior change and figure out ways to help increase motivation. For men with low levels of motivation to change, it may be better to suggest that this may not be the best time to start a dietary change program, but that they should consider trying again when they are more motivated.

For those of you interested in stages-of-change research (Prochaska and DiClemente’s Transtheoretical Model), the social support factor is recommended as most effective at the action and maintenance stages.

Maintaining Nutrition Security and Diet Quality: The Role of the Food Stamp Program and WIC

A study conducted by the USDA’s Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP) examined the contribution of the Food Stamp Program (FSP) and the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to the nutrition security and diet quality of low-income participating households. To examine relationships between diet quality and food program participation, the researchers used the USDA’s 1989-1991 Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals (CSFII) to analyze how the diet quality of low-income households is affected by participation in the FSP and WIC. The

measure used to assess the overall quality of individuals’ diets was the USDA Healthy Eating Index (HEI). The HEI combines information on the amount and variety of foods consumed with compliance to recommended dietary guidelines, i.e., the USDA *Food Guide Pyramid* and the 1995 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Ten components make up the HEI; five are based on the food groups from the Food Guide Pyramid, four are based on saturated fat and cholesterol intakes, and one is a variety component. Use of this index allowed the researchers to examine changes in diet quality associated with program benefits that may involve consuming less of particular dietary components and more of others.

Results of the study suggest that both programs contribute significantly to maintaining and improving the nutritional well-being of low-income households, considering both quantity and quality of diet components. On average, the estimated effect of the Food Stamp Program participation on the overall diet is positive. The effect increases with increased value of food stamps received, i.e., for each additional dollar of food stamps received, the aggregate household HEI score increased by an estimated 0.22 points. In terms of its effect on HEI components, the Food Stamp Program had statistically significant and positive effects on the consumption of vegetables, dairy, and meat products, as well as on sodium component scores.

Participation in the WIC Program by household members improved household level HEI scores dramatically. WIC participation alone contributed 23.45 points to the aggregate household HEI score. This overall effect was distributed about evenly in all diet quality components except for saturated fat. The finding that WIC participation improved household scores for some diet components not included in the WIC food package, e.g. fruit and vegetables, had several possible explanations by the authors:

1. Consumption of the WIC food package improves diet quality scores for the types of foods that it includes, e.g., dairy products and grains,

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as well as frees up food stamps and income to purchase more of all foods for the household.

2. Households participating in the WIC Program are more health and nutrition oriented than are other households, including households receiving only food stamps.
3. Nutrition education received as part of participation in the WIC Program is likely to improve diet quality through better diet related behaviors.

The full report can be accessed on USDA's Food and Nutrition Service web page at:

<http://www.usda.gov/cnpp/FENR%20V11N1&2/toc.htm>

They Can't Stand the Heat?

Men still seem to be staying out of the kitchen, according to researchers who studied data collected as part of the USDA's 1994 Continuing Survey of Food Intakes of Individuals (CFSII). They found that, when it comes to meal planning, shopping and food preparation in two-parent families, women still shoulder the vast bulk of the domestic responsibility despite decades of increasing involvement in the work force. The study showed 23% of men (93% of women) are involved with meal planning; 36% of men (88% of women) take part in grocery shopping; 27% of men (90% of women) participate in meal preparation.

In addition, this study sought to identify particular types of households in which the man was more likely to be involved in meal planning, shopping and food preparation. Male heads of household from lower-income households were more likely to be involved in each of the meal-related tasks than were men in higher-income households. According to the authors, one possible explanation for this finding is that in lower-income households where less money is available for time-saving meal options, such as

eating out or purchasing convenience foods, men may be more likely to assist their partner in family meals.

Men in households in which the female head of household worked full-time were more likely to be involved in meal planning and preparation. However, the proportion of males involved in these tasks in these households was still modest (meal planning, 31%; food shopping, 39%; and meal preparation, 39%).

Men in households with fewer members were more likely to be involved in each of the meal activities. This association was independent of the man's age, household income, and employment status of the female head of household. According to the authors, one possible explanation for this result is that, in households with children, male and female heads of household may be more likely to divide labor based on traditional gender roles, with the woman responsible for tasks such as dish washing and cooking.

Younger male heads of households were more likely to be involved in meal planning and preparation. It is unclear, however, whether the difference in male involvement by age found in this study reflects an age or cohort effect. The authors explained that if gender role attitudes tend to be instilled at a relatively young age and remain fairly fixed as persons age, then it might be concluded that the differences in participation in meal-related tasks by age represent the fact that older men had been socialized into more traditional gender roles (cohort effect). On the other hand, it is possible that traditionalism with regard to meal-related domestic tasks increases as persons grow older (age effect). Due to the cross-sectional design of the survey, it is not possible to determine whether findings reflect an age or cohort effect.

The findings in this study indicate that male

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heads of household tend to be involved in family meal-related tasks to a far lesser extent than are female heads of household, which suggests that women continue to play a key role in family nutrition in households with both a male and female head. These results provide little reason to change current nutrition intervention strategies that target women. However, it should be noted that in some households (e.g., lower-income households, households in which women work full-time, smaller households, and households headed by younger men), the male head of household is more likely to be involved in these activities and men's influence over food choices still needs to be considered in designing nutrition interventions.

The full article, **Guess Who's Cooking? The Role of Men in Meal Planning, Shopping, and Preparation**, can be found in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, September 1998, 98(9);p. 995-1000.

NETWORK UPDATE

The Nutrition Education Network met in September to draft a plan for the Network's major efforts in FY 1999. As a primary part of this plan, it was decided that Wisconsin would pilot a social marketing promotion that would be implemented in FY 2000. The social marketing promotion would be based on data from the needs assessment completed last year by the Network and the Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program, as well as from a Wisconsin/Minnesota research project on fruit and vegetable consumption in low income mothers.

Considering the Network's mission, it was decided that the unique feature of the social marketing promotion would be evaluating the effectiveness of the promotion when it is augmented by collaborative education at the local level. A number of counties will be selected to participate in a pilot study. Several of these counties

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would implement the marketing components of the promotion (e.g., bus shelter/food pantry/WIC clinic posters, posters for community gathering places, newspaper ads, and/or radio PSA's) in addition to collaborating within their communities to plan and offer education that complements the social marketing message. In other counties, "business would go on as usual." The counties identified to implement social marketing would send a team consisting of local nutrition education leaders to one or two Network-sponsored training sessions. These county teams would participate in training sessions on social marketing techniques, stages of change behavioral model, and collaboration in preparation for the promotion.

Another priority objective for the Network in FY 1999 is the development of a web-based resource guide that facilitates coordination of nutrition education materials from state agencies. The first content area to be developed will be the area connected with the social marketing promotion. Both English and non-English materials will be identified and catalogued by categories such as age and stages of change.

OUR MISSION:

The Nutrition Education Network of Wisconsin facilitates collaborative planning of nutrition education programs at the state and local levels. We promote healthful and enjoyable eating so that Wisconsin's low income individuals and families receive consistent, positive, relevant, accurate, and effective nutrition messages.

Nutri-Net News is one way that the Network shares information and resources to accomplish this mission.