

NUTRI-NET NEWS

July 2001

This newsletter is a service of the Nutrition Education Network of Wisconsin. The Network 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.

Visit our Web site at:
<http://www.nutrisci.wisc.edu/nutrinet/>

Food Insecurity Puts Low-Income Women at Risk for Obesity

Kate Pederson, Coordinator, Nutrition Education Network, UW-Extension

Individuals with food insecurity¹ might be expected to have reduced food intake and thus less likely to be overweight, but new research challenges that viewpoint.² Using data from the 1994-1996 Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals (CSFII), Marilyn Townsend of the University of California, Davis and her colleagues found that the prevalence of obesity increased among women as their food insecurity increased:

Prevalence of Overweight among Women Who Reported:	
Not having enough to eat	Having enough to eat
52%	34%

Food insecurity remained a significant predictor of overweight status, after adjustment for demographic and lifestyle variables.

First look at link between hunger and obesity:

The suggestions of a relationship between hunger and obesity in the United States was first proposed in a case study in 1994.³

Dietz suggested that "food choices or physiologic adaptations in response to episodic food shortages could cause increased body fat." He recommended further research to confirm his hypothesis. So far, only one other study of 193 rural women in New York State has suggested a possible link.⁴ Those researchers proposed that food insecurity influenced weight gain by causing disordered eating patterns related to involuntary, temporary food restriction.

The food acquisition cycle:

According to Townsend's group, one possible explanation for the high prevalence of overweight among food stamp recipients involves a food acquisition cycle. Abundant

(Continued on page 2)

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Nutri-Net News

food supplies may be available the first 3 weeks of the month, followed by a week without food stamps or money when food is limited. When money and food stamps are available again at the first of the month, food insecure families may overeat calorically-dense foods. Many studies indicate that binge eating can result in weight gain. Overeating by food insecure families when food is plentiful (i.e. when food stamps or money for food is available, followed by a short period of involuntary food restriction, followed by overeating) may be a pattern that results in gradual weight gain over time.

The finding of a **gender difference** in the food insecurity/overweight relationship may also be important. One explanation cited by Townsend and her group is that food insecure women are often heads of households with children, whereas men reporting food insecurity are often alone. According to Christine Olson, a Cornell University researcher, women as managers of the household food supply often deprive themselves to feed the rest of the family, leaving them more vulnerable to the famine-feast cycle of eating.

In a June 18th article in the magazine, *Nature*,⁵ Moira Tidball, a nutritionist at the Capital Area Food Bank in Washington DC, was quoted as saying that the link between hunger and obesity is a real problem, especially when an estimated 12% of US households have an uncertain food supply. "It's a malnutrition of a different sort," she says. **People are stretching their dollar to buy the wrong kinds of food.**

"Poor neighborhoods often lack large grocery stores, forcing people, especially those without cars, to shop at small, local convenient stores which stock little fresh fruit or vegetables but plenty of high fat, high starch processed food," says Tidball. In addition, those short on time and money often opt for cheap, fast food and high sugar drinks. And many food insecure women, for example, may not recognize the value of fruit juice over fruit-flavored sugar drinks.

Given that the rates of both obesity and food insecurity are on the rise, this research topic needs further investigation. The finding that food insecurity had unexpected consequences, i.e., higher rates of overweight, the potential for increased incidence of obesity-related chronic diseases such as diabetes will need to be addressed.

Townsend's study documented a relationship that does not prove cause/effect and there may be other factors that affect obesity such as eating patterns or family medical history. Therefore, it is still premature to conclusively point to poverty as the primary cause of obesity in this population.

Implications for Nutrition Educators:

- Need for teaching food insecure women diet quality, e.g., high fat versus lower fat food choices and 100% fruit juice versus fruit-flavored sugar drinks, etc.
- Need for teaching individuals food resource management or how to "stretch food dollars" throughout the month to reduce the need to purchase inexpensive, high-fat and high-sugar foods at the end of the month when resources are scarce.

Endnotes:

¹ People in some households in the United States lack access to enough food to meet their basic needs. Food security means that people have access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. In this article, food insecurity is defined using the definition widely adopted by scientists and policy makers. Food insecurity: "limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited and uncertain ability to acquire acceptable food in socially acceptable ways." U.S. (Department of Health and Human Services. *Healthy People 2010*. 2nd Ed. With Understanding and Improving Health and Objectives for Improving Health. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2000.)

² Townsend MS, Peerson J, Love B, Achterberg C, Murphy SP. Food Insecurity is Positively Related to Overweight in Women. *Journal of Nutrition*, 131, 1738-1745, 2001.

³ Dietz WH. Does Hunger Cause Obesity? *Pediatrics* 95:766-767. 1995

⁴ Frongillo EA, Olson CM, Rauschenbach BS, Kendall A. Nutritional Consequences of Food Insecurity in a Rural New York State County. Discussion Paper No. 1120-97. Insstitute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin, Madison

⁵ Lok C. Lean Times Add Pounds. *Nature*. June, 2001

For more information

On food insecurity and the extent of hunger in Wisconsin, check out the *Status Report on Hunger in Wisconsin* at

www.fighthungerwi.com

This report was prepared by the Wisconsin Food Security Consortium, a recently-formed partnership of 20 government, business, community and university representatives.

Nutri-Net News

Food Stamp Reauthorization

Jon Janowski, Director of Advocacy, Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee

The Food Stamp Program helps more than 200,000 people each month in Wisconsin. Because the program is the “last defense against hunger” for many poor households, its reauthorization in Congress takes on added significance.

In fiscal year 2002, Congress will again undertake the challenge of reauthorizing the program. Many advocates believe this reauthorization cycle is one that may bring major changes to the Food Stamp Program.

Food Stamp Workgroup

Partly as a response to the looming Congressional debates over the program, the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) created the Food Stamp Workgroup last September to discuss ways in which the program could be improved.

Members of Food Stamp Workgroup:

1. Department of Administration
2. Department of Workforce Development
3. Department of Health and Family Services
4. Wisconsin Grocers Association
5. Various advocacy organizations.
 - WISCAP
 - Lutheran Office of Public Policy
 - WI Council on Children and Families
 - Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee

To guide its discussions, the group used a document recently published by the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) as its guide. The APHSA document includes that organization’s recommendations for how the Food Stamp Program should be changed during the upcoming reauthorization debates.

The complete document can be found at www.aphsa.org.

The DOA workgroup feels that the APHSA document is a good start for reauthorization discussions but it does not go far enough. Recently, the workgroup came up with sixteen specific policy recommendations.

Top Priorities of Workgroup:

Among the top priorities identified by the group are:

- Increasing the gross income test
- Eliminating the asset test
- Increasing participants’ minimum benefit levels
- Making shelter costs more realistic for eligibility determinations
- Simplifying application processing, change reporting, and recertifications

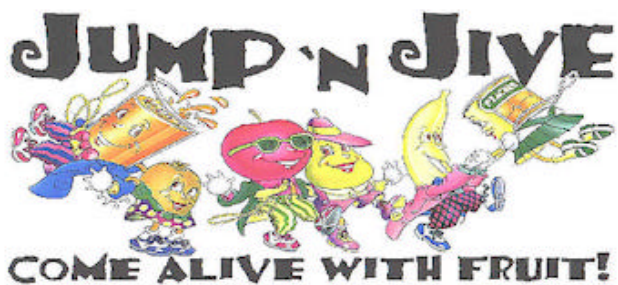
Congressional Hearings this Summer

The workgroup next plans to tell the state’s Congressional members about their recommendations. Congressional hearings on food stamp reauthorization will likely begin this summer.

For More Information:

If you would like more information on the DOA workgroup’s recommendations for food stamp reauthorization, please contact Jon Janowski at 414-777-0483 or at jon@hungertaskforce.org.

Nutri-Net News



Network Update

JUMP 'N JIVE Workshops

Almost 90 nutrition educators from WIC/Public Health, WNEP/Extension, schools, Head Start, Aging Programs, hospitals and other agencies with a nutrition education component attended the *JUMP 'N JIVE* workshops that were held in Green Bay, Medford, and Madison the last two weeks of May. These agencies represented one or more of the 34 counties that will be participating in a multi-agency promotion of the *JUMP 'N JIVE...Come Alive with Fruit* message for low-income parents and caregivers during the months of October and November 2001.

Workshop Content:

- Brief history of the Wisconsin Nutrition Education Network
- Overview of the social marketing model – a nutrition education approach emphasized by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the USDA.
- Research that shaped the campaign's message and logo
- The campaign's nutrition education materials.
- Evaluation results of last fall's campaign and evaluation plans for the second round of the campaign
- Time was provided for nutrition educators to connect with their colleagues from other agencies and programs, share ideas, and develop plans for their campaigns.

Network Update

Participant Evaluations of Workshops

Participants rated each segment on how well it helped them in planning for their local *JUMP 'N JIVE* campaign. (5=very helpful and 1=not helpful.) Average workshop evaluation scores were 4.67 in Green Bay, 4.32 in Medford, and 4.11 in Madison. Participants felt the Group Planning segment and Sharing Results segment were the most helpful segments with respective scores of 4.37 and 4.33.

What's New for Campaign 2001?

In addition to the six original tip sheets that were translated into Spanish last year, this year's campaign will include additional translated materials. Among the materials that are currently being translated and reviewed are the cranberry tip sheet, all three interactive displays, and the parent handouts/menu backs.

Future Plans for the Network

Along with Wisconsin Extension's Nutrition Education Program (WNEP), the Network has submitted a plan to USDA Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) for the upcoming fiscal year (October 1, 2001 – September 30, 2002.) If approved, the Network will begin planning for a new campaign with a physical activity message based on needs of the limited income population for implementation in the spring of 2003.

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.