



Media Talking Points for the New WIC Food Packages

General description of the WIC Program

- The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), is a federal program that provides nutrition education, supplemental foods, breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals for health care and social services. WIC serves low-income pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women, infants and children until the age of five. WIC has proven effective in preventing and improving nutrition-related health problems within its population.
- The WIC Program is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). It is administered by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health, Women's and Children's Section, Nutrition Services Branch. The services are provided by county health departments, community and rural health centers, and community action agencies.
- The North Carolina WIC Program currently serves more than 270,000 participants each month. In **[insert county or agency name]**, we serve approximately **[insert number of participants]** each month.

Background on changes to the food packages

- Since its inception, the only significant change made in the WIC food packages occurred in 1992, when the foods provided for breastfeeding women were expanded. Originally, WIC supplemental foods were meant to eliminate vitamin deficiencies. Today, it's more a problem of eating too much and not getting enough physical activity that we have to deal with. Changes have occurred in the major health and nutrition risks faced by the general population as well as the WIC population. We see diets lacking in whole grains and fruit and vegetables, short duration of breastfeeding, and overweight and obesity.
- The USDA contracted with the Institute of Medicine (IOM) to independently review the WIC Food Packages. USDA charged the IOM with reviewing the nutritional needs of the WIC population and recommending cost-neutral changes to the WIC food packages. The new rules were enacted by Congress and become effective October 1, 2009.
- The new foods are intended to: 1) reduce the prevalence of inadequate and excessive nutrient intakes in participants; 2) contribute to an overall dietary pattern consistent with the *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*; 3) contribute to an overall diet that is consistent with established dietary recommendations for infants and children less than two years of age, including encouragement and support for breastfeeding; 4) be suitable for low-income persons who may have limited transportation, storage and cooking facilities; 5) be readily

acceptable, widely available and commonly consumed; 6) consider cultural food preferences; 7) provide incentives for families to participate in the WIC program; and 8) consider the impact that changes will have on vendors and WIC agencies.

- The changes in the WIC food packages have the potential for improving the nutrition and health of North Carolina's low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants and young children.

Overview of the changes to the food packages

- The changes support the North Carolina WIC Program key messages; 1) breastfeed your baby; 2) eat more fiber; 3) lower the fat; 4) eat more fruits and vegetables; 5) eat more whole grains; 6) drink less juice and sweetened beverages; and 7) make family meals matter.
- Whole grains were added to the WIC food package to help increase fiber in the diets of participants. Options include whole-wheat/whole-grain breads, whole-wheat tortillas, soft-corn tortillas or brown rice. In addition the North Carolina WIC Program has chosen to include almost all whole-grain cereals.
- Fruits and vegetables were added to the WIC food package to help increase fiber in the diets of participants. Participants are able to select from a wide variety of fresh, frozen or canned fruits and vegetable with no added salt, sugar or fat. The one exception is white potatoes, which are not allowed by the federal regulations. White potatoes are the most commonly consumed vegetable – often in the form of French fries. Sweet potatoes are allowed. With the addition of fruits and vegetables to the food packages, the amount of juice that participants receive has been reduced.
- The WIC Program is also offering infant fruits and vegetables to babies six months of age and older. Juice is no longer an approved food on the infant food package.
- The WIC Program is providing reduced-fat, low-fat or fat-free milk for participants over two years of age. This is consistent with the current *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics. WIC participants, who need whole milk, require a prescription from their doctors. The prescription needs to include the medical reason for whole milk. Lower fat milk has all the nutrients of whole milk, with less fat and calories.
- The standard food packages for most participants do not include cheese; however, WIC participants can still get cheese by substituting some milk for cheese. There is a one pound limit for most participants.

- WIC participants are also able to substitute some of the milk for tofu. They can receive either cheese or tofu, but not both. Since tofu does not offer the exact same nutrition as milk does, WIC requires a doctor's prescription for tofu for children. Depending on her category, a woman is able to get two, four or six pounds of tofu without a prescription. For larger quantities, a prescription is required.
- The foods that a new mother gets from WIC depend on how she chooses to feed her baby. Fully breastfeeding women get a greater variety of foods and in greater amounts.
- Fully breastfed babies also receive larger quantities of infant fruits and vegetables at six months of age. In addition, they receive infant meats.
- WIC is a supplemental program and is not designed to meet all of a baby's nutrient needs. The amount of formula depends on the infant's age and how he is fed. The North Carolina WIC Program provides the maximum amount of formula allowed by the federal regulations.

Summary of changes for women

- A summary of the changes to the food packages for women include: 1) fruits and vegetables are added; 2) whole grains including whole-wheat/whole-grain bread, whole-wheat tortillas, soft-corn tortillas and brown rice are added; 3) almost all cereals are whole grain; 4) tofu can be substituted for milk; 5) salmon is added as a choice for fully breastfeeding women; 6) canned beans, peas and lentils are allowed in place of dried; 7) whole milk is eliminated; and 8) there is a reduction in the amount of milk, cheese, eggs and juice.

Summary of changes for infants

- A summary of the changes to the food packages for infants include: 1) formula amounts are tied to the feeding practice and age of the infant; 2) complimentary foods are delayed until six months; 3) juice is eliminated; 4) infant fruits and vegetables are added; 5) infant meats are added for fully breastfed babies.

Summary of changes for children

- A summary of the changes to the food packages for children include: 1) fruits and vegetables are added; 2) whole grains including whole-wheat/whole-grain bread, whole-wheat tortillas, soft-corn tortillas and brown rice are added; 3) almost all cereals are whole grain; 4) tofu can be substituted for milk with a doctor's prescription; 5) canned beans, peas and lentils are allowed in place of dried; 6) whole milk is eliminated; and 7) there is a reduction in the amount of milk, cheese, eggs and juice.