

Study confirms collaboration of good nutrition messages prompts improvement in fruit consumption and activity levels

Collaborative efforts to teach good nutrition and physical activity habits to children and their parents have been found effective to a certain degree, according to a recent study conducted by the Office of Surveillance, Evaluation and Planning, Section for Nutritional Health and Services, Department of Health and Senior Services.

With a significant number of Missouri children from low-income families at-risk for nutritionally-related diseases, two state-administered and federally-funded programs—the WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children) and the Head Start Program—recently teamed together to determine ways to help reduce this risk.

The incidence of overweight children, who are destined to become obese adults facing such debilitating diseases as obesity, diabetes, heart disease and hypertension, has risen dramatically in the past decade, according to health officials.

The goal of the study was to determine effective ways of increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables along with physical activity levels. Additionally, the program developers also sought to increase participation in the state’s WIC program, which not only provides checks to purchase nutritional foods but nutrition education as well.

One study group included children participating in both the Head Start Program and WIC. The other control group included only children in the WIC program. Nutrition lessons and activities were coordinated and reinforced at both Head Start and WIC centers.

These nutrition lessons included:

- [“Take a Trip to the Market with Kip,”](#) which involves sock puppets and the use of a book with a character called Kip who is shopping for fruits and vegetables;
- “I Choose Fruits,” which helps children choose fruits with Kip;
- “And the Winner Is...A Lesson About Choices,” which allows the children to experiment with foods that are high in fat and those that aren’t;
- “Eating the Alphabet from A to Z,” which includes learning about a wide variety of fruits and vegetables; and
- “Five-A-Day Fruits and Vegetables,” which involves children counting to five and eating a variety of fruits and vegetables.

The parents were also taught about improving nutrition with lessons that coordinated with what their children were learning.

Results revealed that the children learning at both Head Start and the WIC center did indeed improve their nutrition in that they ate more fruits and fewer sweets. The control group reflected less improvement. There was also a slight increase in physical activities among the Head Start children. Participation in the WIC program did not change significantly for either group during the study.

Future recommendations are to encourage collaboration with Head Start and other day care centers where children participating in WIC receive care to increase the frequency and consistency of message delivery.

[FULL TEXT](#)