

Evaluation of a Pilot Project: Adding Yogurt to the WIC Food Package for Women

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Little is known about the dairy preferences of WIC participants. To our knowledge, this is the first study to document the outcome of providing yogurt as a milk substitute to low-income women in WIC.

This study was a pilot involving relatively few participants over a short time period of time with some restrictions on the kind of yogurt provided (only one size, one brand, and a few flavors). However, this pilot study was rigorously designed enabling data to be collected from intervention and control groups that were nearly identical demographically and with similar attitudes and behaviors at baseline. Further, those who completed the study and those who did not had essentially the same study characteristics, thus eliminating bias that could compromise study findings.

The full report presents a wealth of information on dietary attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that can be used to better understand dairy consumption patterns of WIC participants.

Below are key findings related to the participants' receptivity to the yogurt program, the feasibility of providing yogurt vouchers in WIC, the dietary contribution of yogurt in WIC, and the dietary contribution of yogurt to those at greatest risk for low dairy consumption.

- WIC participants were overwhelmingly eager (86%) to substitute yogurt vouchers for some of their milk vouchers. More women reported strong agreement with liking the taste of yogurt as compared to those reporting strong agreement with liking the taste of milk (31% vs. 18% respectively).
- During this short intervention, most women (90%) used at least one of the coupons for a 32-fl oz container of yogurt, despite limited flavor and container size choices.
- Cost analyses, while demonstrating that yogurt was more expensive than milk, found that yogurt may be less expensive than various milk substitutes such as tofu, particularly when evaluated by the calcium contribution of the alternatives.
- WIC participants who used the WIC yogurt coupons, in contrast to the controls who did not receive WIC yogurt coupons, reported a trend of increasing their yogurt intake on average of 1.0 fl oz per day ($p=0.09$). There was no significant decrease in their consumption of other dairy products during this period, indicating that the nutrients from the addition of yogurt may be considered additive, rather than compensatory.
- Low yogurt consumers (less than 1 fl oz per day at baseline) were most likely to benefit from the provision of yogurt coupons, i.e., participants with the lowest yogurt consumption at baseline showed greater increases in yogurt consumption as a result of the intervention. Low yogurt consumers in the intervention group increased their daily yogurt consumption during the study period by 2.8 fl oz per day relative to the low yogurt consumers in the control group ($p=0.003$).