

California WIC Yogurt Pilot: Adding Yogurt to the WIC Food Package for Women

Pilot Result Highlights

Little is known about the dairy preferences of WIC participants. Indeed, it is believed that this is the first study to document the outcome of providing yogurt as a partial substitute for milk to low-income women in WIC.

This study involved relatively few participants over a short period of time with some restrictions on the kind of yogurt provided (only 32.0 oz size Yoplait® yogurt in 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 ($p=0.003$).

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Pilot Overview and Objectives

Background

In December 2007 the USDA published the Interim Final WIC Food Package Rule for the WIC Program, making substantial changes to the foods allowed under this supplemental food program, to be implemented by October 1, 2009. The National Academies' Institute of Medicine (IOM) researched the current WIC food packages extensively and made a recommendation to add yogurt as a substitute for part of the milk allowance. However, the USDA requirement is that any change be cost neutral to the WIC Program. The USDA is concerned that the addition of yogurt cannot be made while achieving cost neutrality and has asked states for assistance in exploring how yogurt could be provided.

The California WIC Program sought to better understand how yogurt might work within their program. This pilot project provides important information on the popularity of yogurt and the feasibility of providing yogurt within the WIC Program. In addition, the results provide data on dairy preferences of WIC participants.

Pilot Objectives

The key objectives of the yogurt pilot are to:

- Understand the impact of yogurt on the nutrition intakes of participants;
- Understand the value to participants of adding yogurt as an option;
- Determine the cost-feasibility of substituting yogurt in place of some of the milk offered.

Pilot Scope

The pilot involved two small local agencies within the California WIC program. Approximately 600 eligible women were included in the study, half of whom were offered a one-month allocation of yogurt (the intervention group) at a lower amount than recommended by the IOM. The pilot began in March of 2009 and was completed in October, 2009.

WIC participants were provided two free Yoplait® yogurt coupons, allowing for selection from five Yoplait 32.0 oz products, each of which met the nutritional criteria recommended by the IOM. WIC participants were also provided educational resources on the uses of yogurt in meals and snacks and assisted with finding a retailer where coupons could be redeemed.

Pilot Partners

The WIC Yogurt Pilot was conducted through a multi-organization partnership. Collaborators involved in various stages of the study included representatives from Children's Hospital & Research Center, Oakland, the Dr. Robert C. and Veronica Atkins Center for Weight and Health at the University of California, Berkeley, the California WIC Program and local WIC agencies, the Dairy Council of California, the National Dairy Council, General Mills and Yoplait.