

# m e m o

**DATE:** October 13, 2021  
**TO:** WIC Coordinators and Local Agency Staff  
**FROM:** State WIC Staff  
**SUBJECT:** Understanding the WIC Food Package - #1 in the Food Package Series

**Promote Utilization of WIC Benefits** is a goal for the FY 2022-2023 Nutrition Education Plan. One objective of the goal is “to build WIC staff understanding of the WIC food package and allowed foods”. This is the first of a series of memos highlighting the WIC food package, planned for the second Wednesday of each month.

Here is a timeline of how the WIC food package was established and has advanced over the years.

***Did you know that WIC started as a two-year pilot project under 1972 legislation sponsored by Senator Hubert H. Humphrey?***

The impetus for the project came from physicians meeting with officials from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in the late 1960s. They described pregnant women in their medical clinics with various ailments that were caused by a lack of food. Doctors shared that the women needed “prescriptions for food”. To learn more, see [The WIC Program: Background, Trends, and Issues](#).

***Did you know that the program was originally called the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children?***

In 1974, WIC was established as a permanent program since “substantial numbers of pregnant women, infants, and young children are at special risk in respect to their physical and mental health by reason of poor or inadequate nutrition or health care.” The purpose of the program was to provide supplemental foods that contain nutrients known to be lacking in the diets of the target population, in particular foods containing high quality protein, iron, calcium, vitamin A and vitamin C. A nutrition education component was included.

Success! “WIC was primarily established to address the pernicious effects of malnutrition, including significant rates of iron-deficiency anemia. Beginning in its early years, WIC played an instrumental role in decreasing anemia rates and pushing industry partners to develop iron fortified products, including infant formulas and cereals.” [NWA WIC Food Package Report](#).

***Did you know that infants used to receive infant juice from WIC?***

An interim rule in 2007 revised the WIC food packages to better align the WIC food packages with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and infant feeding practice guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Recommendations for changes were made by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academies (now known as the National Academies

of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, NASEM) based on scientific information about the nutrition needs of WIC participants. USDA reviewed the IOM recommendations along with thousands of comment letters and made modifications to ensure cost neutrality.

All State agencies were required to implement the food package revisions of the interim rule in 2009. Significant food package changes were made to:

- Align with the Dietary Guidelines.
  - Addition of the fruit and vegetable Cash Value Voucher for women and children.
  - Emphasis on whole grains with the addition of whole grain products and a new requirement that half of all cereals be whole grain.
  - Authorization of only fat-free and low-fat milk for women and children over 2 years of age.
- Follow AAP infant feeding guidelines.
  - Infant meats were added to provide a source of iron and zinc for fully breastfed infants. Infant fruits and vegetables were added for all infants.
  - Juice for infants was eliminated since AAP recommends no juice be consumed before one year of age.
- Better promote and support the establishment of successful long-term breastfeeding by introducing enhanced tailoring of infant and mother food packages.
- Add culturally appropriate foods and more choices, such as the addition of milk alternatives like soy beverage and tofu.

The rule was finalized in 2014. For more information see [WIC Food Packages: Time for a Change](#)

Success! Here are some of the outcomes for participants after the 2009 WIC Food Package changes:

- Increased purchases and consumption of fruits and vegetables; whole grains; and fat-free and low-fat dairy.
- Reduced intake of sodium, saturated fat, and sugar.
- Improved access to healthy foods due to changes in allowable products and minimum stocking requirements for WIC vendors. This increased availability of healthier foods, including in low-income neighborhoods.

Significant improvements to the health of participants are attributed to this greater access to and consumption of healthy foods. See [NWA WIC Food Package Report](#) to learn more.

### **What's next?**

- A review of the WIC food package is required every 10 years. In 2017, NASEM released [Review of WIC Food Packages: Improving Balance and Choice](#).
- Building on the 2009 changes, the new recommendations used the most recently available science to improve the balance among the food groups within the packages and further increase choice and flexibility, as well as culturally suitable options (to promote redemption and consumption). The new recommendations better align with the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Some proposed changes from NASEM include:
  - Increasing Cash Value Benefit for fruits and vegetables.
  - Providing fish to all.
  - Increasing whole grains.
  - Reducing amounts of juice, milk, legumes, and peanut butter.

- USDA is reviewing NASEM’s recommendations and expected to release a proposal for food package revisions later this year. At that time the proposal will be opened for public comment from WIC staff, participants, vendors, manufacturers, etc. We will notify you when that happens!

**Next month’s memo:** The nutritional value of WIC foods.

## Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

The WIC Program: Background, Trends, and Issues

([https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/46648/15834\\_fanrr27c\\_1\\_.pdf?v=41063](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/46648/15834_fanrr27c_1_.pdf?v=41063))

NWA WIC Food Package Report (<https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/nwa-wic-food-package-report.pdf>)

WIC Food Packages: Time for a Change (<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/Time4AChange%28mainrpt%29.pdf>)

Review of WIC Food Packages: Improving Balance and Choice

(<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/23655/review-of-wic-food-packages-improving-balance-and-choice-final>)

Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 85 E 7<sup>th</sup> Place, PO BOX 64882, ST PAUL MN 55164-0882; 651-201-4404, [health.wic@state.mn.us](mailto:health.wic@state.mn.us), [www.health.state.mn.us](http://www.health.state.mn.us); to obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-4404