Bridging the Communication Gap:
Inspiring Low Income, Moms with Relevant and Realistic Nutrition Messages!

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Abstract

Background: Mothers have a tremendous influence over the food and feeding environments of their households and the development of healthful eating habits of their children. The decreasing technology gap creates opportunities to reach low-income populations with clear, relevant, realistic and inspiring nutrition information.

Program background: The Federal Nutrition assistance programs provide food assistance to millions of low-income moms and kids each month. The nutrition education and counseling service these programs provide play an important role in motivating moms to offer more healthful meals and use child-feeding methods that support development of healthy eating habits, practices which can help reduce diet-related diseases among minority and low-income groups.3

Methods and Results: The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) developed messages, related content and tools that address some of the barriers to healthful eating low-income moms face. These materials facilitate cross-program coordination and help nutrition educators "speak with one voice". Sixty focus groups in 9 locations informed this project. Participants were culturally diverse English and Spanish speaking mothers with incomes within 185% of poverty level. This research captured information on mothers' food practices, beliefs, reactions to message concepts and photos, and their information-seeking behaviors and preferences. Products include 29 messages with related tips and advice, rollover widgets, videos, and photos that help to convey key recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs). Dissemination methods include online posting, webinars, social media and other marketing methods. Use of these products is monitored through Google analytics, an online feedback mechanism, reports from regions and periodical calls for examples via listserv and other tools.

Conclusions: This research provided valuable insights into the mindset of this audience. The products can facilitate development of traditional/online tools that are clear, relevant, feasible and inspiring to low-income moms.

Implications for research and/or practice: Public health professionals can use these resources to augment theory-based initiatives to help low-income mothers and children make healthier food choices as a preventive approach for reducing diet-related chronic diseases. Materials are available at http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/corenutritionmessages/default.htm.

Development Process

Step 1 – Expert Workgroup Reviews Evidence, Defines Audience, and Behaviors Concepts Behaviors

Step 2 – Concepts Tested with Audience (Formative Rounds)

Step 3 – Messages /Tools Created with Stakeholder Input and Tested with Audience (Evaluative Rounds)

Step 4 – Messages/Tools Finalized and Guidebook and Web pages Developed (User & Peer Review)

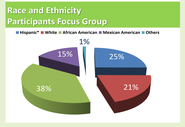
Step 5 – Marketing and Promotion Using e-tools, Direct Contacts, Conferences, etc.

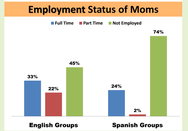
Target Audience

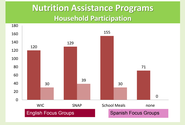
Low Income Moms of Preschool and Elementary Kids and Kids Ages 8-10 Years Old.

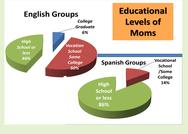
**Hispanic participants were English-speaking mothers from diverse Hispanic groups. The Mexican-American moms were in groups that reviewed the Spanish translations of the materials.*

Demographics

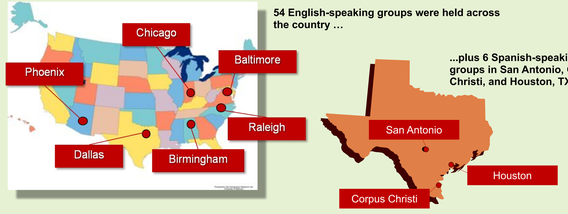








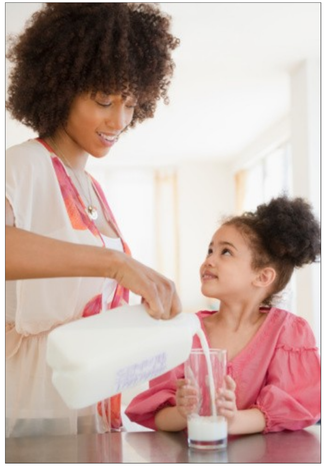
Focus Groups



54 English-speaking groups were held across the country …

…plus 6 Spanish-speaking groups in San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and Houston, TX.

Core Nutrition Messages for Milk, Whole Grains, Fruits & Vegetables, and Child Feeding



Mom is a child's first teacher.

You teach by doing. Every time you drink low-fat or fat-free (1% fat or less) milk or eat yogurt, you're giving your kids a lesson in how to eat for better health. It's a lesson they can use for all their lives.

Give yourself and those you love the goodness of whole grains. Make at least half of the grains you eat whole grains – such as bread, tortillas, pasta and cereals. Whole grains are good for your heart and digestion, and can help you maintain a healthy weight and good overall health.

Enjoy each other while enjoying family meals. Keep meal time relaxed to nourish the body and help your family make stronger connections. Let your little ones select which foods to put on their plates and how much to eat from the healthy choices you provide.

Ellos aprenden observándola. Coma frutas y verduras y sus hijos también lo harán.

They learn by watching you. Eat fruits and veggies and your kids will too.

Rollover Widgets

"In the past when I click on something I get 50 different spam emails."
~Mom, Raleigh

Messages on bottom change as mouse rolls over images. Content is drawn directly from the messages, supporting content and photos.

Videos

Videos, 2-3 minutes long, use a mom-to-mom conversational approach.

Key Findings

- Taste and the belief that whole milk contains more nutrients than lower-fat varieties posed strong barriers to use of other types of milk for many.
- Mothers expressed and demonstrated significant confusion about whole-grain foods, their benefits and how to identify them.
- Fruits and vegetables are top of mind when it comes to foods mothers consider for their children's healthy growth and development. Most believe fresh is much healthier than canned or frozen.
- Mothers struggle with getting their preschoolers to sit down to eat, to eat certain foods, or to eat overall, but many did not believe kids when they say "I'm full mommy."
- Most moms had access to computers and the internet at home or work, search for a variety of information online such as parenting information, recipes , etc., and often use social media.
- Moms want to be good teachers and found the words "learning" and "leading" compelling in the role modeling messages.

Use in Web sites, posters, social media, newsletters, and more!

1

2

3

Patience works better than pressure. Offer your children a variety of foods. Then let them choose how much to eat.

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UNM PRC SNAP-Ed Fruit and Vegetable Video Sp…

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1) Fact sheets on Core Messages "Especially for Moms" Web site; **2)** ChooseMyPlate.gov "Health and Nutrition Information for Preschoolers"; **3)** New York SNAP-Ed "Just Say Yes to Fruits & Vegetables" Web site; **4)** New Mexico SNAP-Ed Spanish posters and videos; **5)** USDA Team Nutrition resources; **6)** WIC "Healthy Eating for Preschoolers" tip sheet; **7)** social media; **8)** Michigan Nutrition Network SNAP-Ed social marketing campaign.