

WIC Research/Health Outcomes

WIC improves the health of nutritionally at-risk women, infants and children. The WIC Program has earned the reputation of being one of the most successful federally-funded nutrition programs in the United States. Studies conducted by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service as well as non-government entities detail the success and cost-effectiveness of the nutrition intervention:

Healthier babies who are more likely to survive infancy ^{2,3,4,5,6,8,9}

- Fewer premature births and infant deaths
- Reduced rates of low birth weight and very low birth weight
- A greater likelihood of receiving prenatal care
- Savings in health care costs

Improved diet and diet-related outcomes ^{3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10}

- WIC increases infants' and children's intake of essential vitamins and minerals, especially iron.
- WIC reduces anemia among children and improves children's general health status.
- WIC participation is associated with improved diets, including increased iron density, fewer added sugars and a greater variety of foods.
- After revisions to WIC food packages in 2009, WIC participants buy and eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products. This change enhanced access to healthier foods for all consumers in low-income areas, regardless of whether they participate in WIC.

Improved infant feeding practices ^{1,5,8,9,11}

- WIC promotes breastfeeding as the optimal method of infant feeding, consistent with the goals and objectives of Healthy People 2020 and the policy statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- More than 95 percent of WIC mothers who initiated breastfeeding reported that their WIC clinic played an important role in their decision to breastfeed. Sixty-one percent of WIC mothers identified the food package as an important factor in their decision to continue to breastfeed longer.
- At least half of WIC caregivers report that they turn to WIC for advice if they have breastfeeding problems and for other information on feeding their infant.
- WIC infants are less likely to be fed solids or cow's milk earlier than recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, potentially preventing digestive problems, nutrient deficiencies and overweight.

Improved rates of childhood immunizations and regular source of medical care

^{3,4,5,8,9}

- WIC participation increases the likelihood of children having up-to-date immunizations.
- Infants and children who participate in WIC are linked to the health care system and are much more likely to receive both preventive and curative care.

Improved cognitive development ^{3,9}

- Prenatal and early childhood participation in WIC is associated with improved cognitive development and academic achievement.
- Children whose mothers participated in WIC while pregnant scored higher in mental development at age 2 and performed better in school than similar children whose mothers did not participate.

Summary

- WIC reduces low birth weight, prematurity, and infant death.
- WIC plays an important role in a mother's decision to initiate and continue breastfeeding.
- WIC improves infant feeding practices and the quality of children's diet.
- WIC decreases the incidence of iron deficiency anemia.
- WIC participants are more likely to receive health care.
- Children who receive WIC demonstrate improved intellectual development.

References

1. American Academy of Pediatrics. Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk. Breastfeeding Policy Statement. *J Pediatrics*. 2012 March; Vol. 129 No. 3.
2. Bitler MP, Currie J. Does WIC work? The effects of WIC on pregnancy and birth outcomes. RAND Corporation, *J Policy Anal Manage*. Winter, 24(1), 2005.
3. Black, Maureen M., et. al., Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Participation and Infants' Growth and Health: A Multisite Surveillance Study. *J Pediatrics*. 2004 July; Vol. 114 No. 1.
4. Fox, Mary Kay, William Hamilton, and Biing-Hwan Lin. Effects of Food Assistance and Nutrition Programs on Nutrition and Health: Volume 4, Executive Summary of the Literature Review. U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report No. (FANRR19-4), December 2004.
5. Oliveira, Victor, Elizabeth Racine, Jennifer Olmstead, and Linda M. Ghelfi. The WIC Program: Background, Trends, and Issues. US Dept. of Agriculture, Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report No. (FANRR27), October 2002.
6. Owen Anita L., George M. Owen. Twenty years of WIC: a review of some effects of the program. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, Volume 97, Issue 7, July 1997.
7. Siega-Riz AM, Kranz S, Blanchette D, Haines PS, Guilkey DK, Popkin BM. The effect of participation in the WIC program on preschoolers' diets. *J Pediatrics*. 2004 Feb; 144(2):229-34.
8. United States Department of Agriculture. Effects of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): A Review of Recent Research. January 2012.
9. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: WIC Works: Addressing the Nutrition and Health Needs of Low Income Families for 40 Years. May 2015.
10. Tatiana Andreyeva, PhD, Amanda S. Tripp, PhD. The healthfulness of food and beverage purchases after the federal food package revisions: The case of two New England states. *Preventive Medicine*, Volume 91, October 2016.
11. United States Department of Agriculture. WIC Infant and Toddler Feeding Practices Study 2: Infant Year Report. January 2017.