



FACT SHEET: FOOD INSECURITY, HEALTH AND DIET-RELATED DISEASE

Overview: The United States is facing public health crises related to obesity and diet-related diseases that affect all segments of the population, but which disproportionately affect populations that struggle with food insecurity. While the relationship between food insecurity, obesity, and diet-related diseases is complex and not yet fully understood, we do know that many of our clients are faced with the dual burden of food insecurity and diet-related disease. The growing attention to the obesity epidemic in the United States has often overshadowed the issue of food insecurity as a major public health challenge. In addition, the design of public health interventions to combat obesity and diet-related disease rarely address food insecurity and the challenges that low-income families face in securing a steady supply of food that is affordable and healthy. Likewise, efforts to combat food insecurity have not typically prioritized strategies to also help address obesity and diabetes. Both of these public health concerns have an impact on our nation's health and economic future.

The Health Impact of Food Insecurity

- In 2011, an estimated 50.1 million individuals (1 in 6) in America struggled with food insecurity
- More than 1 in 5 children under 18 live at risk of hunger in the United States
- Food insecurity has known health consequences for both children and adults:
 - Food-insecure children are more likely to incur developmental delays and struggle in school, have higher rates of fair or poor physical health, are more likely to be hospitalized, and may suffer from anemia.
 - A recent study of national health data found that frail seniors are five times more likely to be food insecure than their healthier counterparts

Overview of Obesity and Diet-Related Disease in the U.S.

- Two-thirds of adults and one-third of children in the US are overweight or obese
- Obese children are more likely to be obese adults
- The obesity epidemic has grown at an alarming rate:
 - Just 15 years ago Mississippi had the *highest* obesity rate at 19%; since then the rate has risen to over 34% and remains the highest in the country. The *lowest* obesity rate of any state is Colorado where obesity rate is 21%
 - Estimates for the medical cost of adult obesity in the United States range from \$147 billion to nearly \$210 billion per year
 - Recent reports from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation indicate child obesity rates are going down in a few cities with this progress being attributed to comprehensive action from policy changes to individual responses; although promising, socioeconomic, geographic, and racial and ethnic disparities in obesity rates persist
- One in three children in the U.S. born in 2000 are expected to develop diabetes at some point in their lifetime; for Latino and African-American children, the rate is estimated to be one in two.
- A person's health status and likelihood of becoming sick and dying early are greatly influenced by powerful social factors such as education, income, nutrition, housing and neighborhoods (RWJF).



Relationship between Food Insecurity, Obesity & Diet-Related Disease

Obesity & Food Insecurity:

- Food insecurity and obesity can coexist in the same individual, family, and community
- One example of this coexistence is in Mississippi, the state with both the highest food insecurity rate (22%) and obesity rate (34%) in 2010.
- Food insecurity and obesity share many similar risk factors, some of which include: limited resources; lack of access to healthy, affordable foods; cycles of deprivation and overeating; and high levels of stress
- Individuals in low-income households and communities are disproportionately affected by obesity, diabetes and food insecurity.
- There is some evidence that suggests risk of obesity is higher for food insecure women and children

Diabetes & Food Insecurity:

- Individuals with food insecurity are disproportionately affected by type 2 diabetes—by its nature food insecurity makes it difficult to manage the diabetes since regular access to healthy food is a core component of diabetes management
- A balanced diet high in fruit, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein and low in in sugar and starches is required to maintain healthy blood sugar levels. Unfortunately, for people struggling with food insecurity and diabetes eating a balanced diet is often not possible, thus leading to cycles of both dangerously high and low blood sugar levels and very serious health consequences
- Initial findings from a multi-year diabetes pilot initiative in three food banks suggest that there are many food pantry clients struggling with diabetes, and many are disconnected from the health care system.

Feeding America's Response

- Food Bank network members across the country are increasing their efforts to address these issues and promote healthy eating and wellness for their clients and communities
- In 2012, Feeding America adopted a new framework for tracking "Foods to Encourage" distributed through the network, which aligns with the 2010 USDA Dietary Guidelines
- In FY 2012, 26% of food distributed through the Feeding America was fresh produce (category) and 35% including both canned and frozen fruits and vegetables
- Three out of 10 food banks (28%) have a formal written nutrition policy for food procurement; 89% of these food banks policies aim to increase healthy food sourced, and 39% aim to decrease the amount of food of with minimal nutritional value.
- Nearly 80% of food banks provide some kind of nutrition education—the topics most commonly addressed are general nutrition knowledge (78%), diabetes (42%) and obesity (39%). 3 food banks are involved in the testing diabetes intervention programs with food pantry clients as part of the Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation Diabetes initiative.
- For the first time, the Hunger in America Study 2014 has a number of questions on both the Agency and Client surveys around health and healthy food access
- Feeding America has partnered with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (the world's largest organization of nutrition professionals) and the National Dairy Council to help increase awareness about food insecurity as a public health issue, increase access to foods to encourage and provide and promote nutrition education.



Key Resources

Center for Disease Control. *Adult Obesity Stats*. <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html>

Institute of Medicine. 2011. *Hunger and Obesity: Understanding a Food Insecurity Paradigm - Workshop Summary*. <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2011/Hunger-and-Obesity-Understanding-a-Food-Insecurity-Paradigm.aspx>

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. 2010. *Food Insecurity Among Children and Families Is There a Relationship?* <http://www.rwjf.org/content/rwjf/en/research-publications/find-rwjf-research/2010/04/food-insecurity--among-children-and-families.html>

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. September 2012. *Health Policy Snapshot*. http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/issue_briefs/2012/rwjf401163

Smit, E. Winters-Stone K.M et al. Nutrition 2012. *British Journal Nutrition: Lower nutritional status and higher food insufficiency in frail older US adults*.

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United States Department of Agriculture. 2012. *Food Security in the U.S.: Key Statistics & Graphics*. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx>