

Teaching parents about the importance of breakfast has benefits for both parent and child

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A unique benefit of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is the inclusion of nutrition education. In a new study in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, researchers report that both online and in-person group education are effective in helping parents reduce breakfast-skipping and improve other breakfast-related nutritional knowledge and benefits.

Studies have shown that eating [breakfast](#) compared with breakfast skipping has been associated with a higher quality diet and decreased risk for obesity.

WIC reaches more than 8 million mothers and children each year and has had a substantial influence on the nation's health. In the past, individual and group education relied on clinic visits. However, as technology has advanced and WIC clientele has become more diverse, additional options for nutrition education are needed. In this study, 590 WIC participants from two Los Angeles, CA WIC clinics were randomly assigned to receive in-person group education (359) or online group education (231). Education focused on ways to reduce breakfast skipping and promoted healthy options at breakfast for parents and their 1- to 5-year-old children. Questionnaires assessing breakfast-related knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors were administered before and after education, and at a 2- to 4-month follow-up. All training was conducted in English or Spanish, as appropriate to the participants.

Both the in-person group participants and the online group participants experienced similar improvements. Both groups reported reductions in barriers to eating breakfast due to time constraints, not having enough foods at home, and difficulty with preparation. There was a greater increase in frequency of eating breakfast for both the parent and child in the online group compared to the in-person group. At follow-up, the improvements in knowledge and behaviors were somewhat reduced, but both groups were better informed than at the beginning of the study.

Lead investigator Lorrene D. Ritchie, PhD, RD, Director and Cooperative Extension Specialist, Nutrition Policy Institute (NPI), University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR), Berkeley, CA, describes the breakfast program. "The goals of the breakfast class were to teach participants why it is important for adults and children to eat breakfast every day, why skipping breakfast can lead to poorer health for children and adults, how WIC foods can be used to make healthy breakfasts, and to have participants set personal goals for eating healthier breakfasts. Additional dietary messages taught in the class were: WIC cereals are healthy cereals and have 6 grams of sugar or less per serving, fruit is a healthy breakfast option, and limit juice to 4 to 6 ounces per day."

WIC researcher, Shannon E. Whaley, PhD, added "Both the in-person and online training sessions were designed to mirror each other, Identical visuals and texts were used in both settings."

Although both online and in-person education were effective, the authors found that English-speakers and Spanish speakers behaved differently in how they chose to receive their education. Although participants were randomly assigned to the in-person or online group, more Spanish speakers were unable to access online education and/or failed to complete the online [education](#) than English speakers. According to lead author Lauren E. Au, PhD, RD, of NPI, "From the perspective of

the dietetics profession, the findings highlight the value of allowing WIC participants the flexibility and convenience of choosing between multiple [nutrition education](#) modalities, which could potentially lead to sustained behavior change in this population."

More information: Lauren E. Au et al. Online and In-Person Nutrition Education Improves Breakfast Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors: A Randomized Trial of Participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* (2015). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jand.2015.10.012](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2015.10.012)

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