

Misreporting diet information could impact nutrition recommendations for Hispanics

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Credit: Photo courtesy Flickr user jeffreyw

You are what you eat, unless you're not quite sure what you ate.

A new paper by Jinan Banna and Marie Kainoa Fialkowski of the University of Hawai'i at Manoa's College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources and Marilyn Townsend of the University of California, Davis' College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences takes a critical look at how faulty self-reporting of the food we eat can lead to incorrect conclusions about whether we are meeting [dietary recommendations](#) for certain [essential nutrients](#).

Banna's study is the first to examine how accounting for the problem of misreporting affects nutrient intake estimates in the Hispanic community. Nearly one in three US residents is projected to be Hispanic in 2060.

The paper, "Misreporting of [dietary intake](#) affects estimated nutrient intakes in low-income Spanish-speaking women," was recently published in the online version of the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*.

Researchers interviewed a group of 82 low-income Mexican American women in California about their

[food intake](#), and then determined how accurate their reported intake was by comparing it to predicted energy requirements.

Their findings revealed that the plausibility of reporting significantly influenced whether a participant met recommendations for several essential nutrients. Estimated energy, protein, cholesterol, dietary fiber, and vitamin E intakes were significantly higher in plausible reporters—those whose self-reported intake the study authors determined to be the most realistic.

These results support the importance of evaluating plausibility of reported intake when analyzing self-reported dietary data to determine whether a population is meeting recommendations.

"Data that does not reflect actual intake may be used by researchers, policy makers and others to take actions to change eating habits, leading to [recommendations](#) that are not based on inaccurate information," Banna warned. "It is important to find ways to ensure that individuals correctly report what they ate so we have a sound basis for drawing conclusions."

One challenge that authors point out is that the traditional Mexican diet—which includes such tasty foods as *atole*, a corn-based gruel, *chilaquiles*, a dish composed of tortillas and sauces, and *aguas frescas de fruta*, homemade fruit-based drinks—includes many items that are not contained on the standard nutrition composition tables.

Future studies might involve examining whether this same phenomenon occurs in other Hispanic subgroups, Banna said.

"It will be important to see how we might prevent this problem of misreporting," she said. "That may mean looking at new ways of collecting information about diet in Hispanics, like asking people to take photographs of the food they eat instead of

performing interviews."

More information: Misreporting of Dietary Intake Affects Estimated Nutrient Intakes in Low-Income Spanish-Speaking Women. Banna, Jinan C. et al. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*. [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2014.06.358](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2014.06.358)

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