

Fruit and vegetable intake still too low; human nutritionist says to focus on lunch

20 August 2014, by Lindsey Elliott

Changes to a supplemental nutrition program are improving the number of fruits eaten daily by children, but kids and adults still aren't reaching the recommended daily intake amounts. A Kansas State University human nutritionist says to reach that amount, you need to focus on lunch.

A new report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention finds that children between the ages of 2 and 18 are eating more whole fruits and drinking less [fruit juice](#), while vegetable intake remains the same. Sandy Procter, assistant professor of human nutrition and coordinator of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program in the university's College of Human Ecology, says the switch from [fruit](#) juice to whole fruit is a big improvement.

"This is a really positive sign for that age group because that's where we were seeing a lot of concern with overconsumption of fruit juice," Procter said. "There has been a real concerted effort to get the message out to well-meaning parents and caregivers that even though 100 percent fruit juice is very nutritious, it is very high in calories. When it is over-served to young children, it can cause diarrhea and contribute to obesity."

Procter attributes the fruit intake improvements to changes made to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, or WIC. In 2007 on a trial basis, the WIC program began allowing the purchase of fresh fruits and [vegetables](#) and decreasing the amount of money available for fruit juice. The changes went into effect for all on the program in January 2014.

Despite the improvement, most children and adults are not getting enough fruits and vegetables. According to the 2013 State Indicator Report on Fruits and Vegetables from the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, the average American eats one serving of fruit and

1.3 servings of vegetables per day. In Kansas, the percent of people who reported consuming fruit less than one time a day is 41 percent. For vegetables, 22 percent reported eating less than one serving of vegetables a day, with French fries included as a vegetable option.

"We talk about five servings a day being pretty easy to accomplish and while it may be easy, we are not getting there," Procter said. "I think as parents are preparing for back to school, it's important to realize that it's fairly simple to accomplish—you just have to plan ahead."

Procter emphasizes lunch as the most important meal for fruit and vegetable consumption and says that if these nutritious components aren't included in lunch, it is very hard to reach the recommended five servings a day of [fruits and vegetables](#). She also says improving dietary patterns in [children](#) will lead to healthier food habits later in life.

More information: "Vital Signs: Fruit and Vegetable Intake Among Children—United States, 2003–2010." Sonia A. Kim, PhD, et al. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR). [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrh...htm?s_cid=mm6331a3_w](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrh.htm?s_cid=mm6331a3_w)

Provided by Kansas State University

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