
Introducing the WIC Program

What is WIC?

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, commonly known as WIC, is a cost-effective nutrition intervention program with demonstrated success in improving the health and nutritional status of women, infants and children. WIC provides nutritious foods and nutrition education, as well as referrals for health care and information on community health and nutrition services to eligible pregnant women, new moms, infants and children less than 5 years of age.

Proper nutrition at the beginning of life can help prevent serious health problems. Infants and preschoolers are going through a period of rapid growth, and intellectual and social development. Their nutritional status and the health care they receive can have a major impact on their ability to function as happy, healthy children.

How is WIC funded and operated?

Funding for WIC is provided by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). WIC operates in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Indian Tribal Organizations and 4 U.S. territories. In Vermont, WIC is part of the Vermont Department of Health, and WIC Program services are provided throughout the State by Department of Health District Offices. Statewide, the WIC Program serves approximately 12,000 participants each month.

WIC participants redeem food benefits at authorized WIC grocery stores that meet certain requirements and sign agreements to follow all WIC Program regulations.

WIC participants have limited incomes and health risks that can be improved through good nutrition. The WIC Program provides supplemental foods high in protein, vitamins and minerals that have been carefully selected and are individually prescribed to meet the nutrition needs of the participant. Health professionals at District Offices determine WIC eligibility based on nutritional risk, income eligibility and Vermont residency.

What are the benefits of WIC for families?

WIC is different from other nutrition programs in several ways:

- WIC eligibility is based on health risk, in addition to income.
- WIC services include nutrition education and health referrals, in addition to food benefits.
- WIC participants receive only the specific types and quantities of foods prescribed to them.

WIC food packages align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and Infant Feeding Practice Guideline of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Women and children may receive:

- Milk, yogurt, eggs & cheese
- Beans, peas & lentils, peanut butter
- Certain brands of iron-fortified cereal
- 100% fruit juices high in vitamin C
- Fresh, canned or frozen fruits and vegetables
- Canned fish
- Whole grains (bread, rice, pasta and tortillas)
- Tofu and soy beverages

Infants may receive:

- Infant cereal
- Jarred baby food fruits & vegetables
- Jarred baby food meats
- Iron-fortified formula

WIC also refers participants to health and social service programs and provides information and education on good eating habits, to help families be healthy and eat well.

Does WIC make a difference?

Yes! Over 70 evaluation studies have been conducted to assess the WIC Program's effectiveness in improving the health of its participants. This research has shown that WIC is effective in improving participants' health. Some of the findings are summarized below.

For pregnant women, WIC participation has been associated with:

- earlier and adequate prenatal care visits.
- greater consumption of iron, protein, calcium and vitamin C.
- longer pregnancies, resulting in fewer premature births.
- improved maternal weight gain.
- larger head sizes of infants, reflecting greater brain growth.
- higher birth weights of infants.

For infants and children, WIC participation has been associated with:

- an increase in the rates of infants being breastfed.
- a reduced incidence of anemia.
- greater consumption of iron, folate and vitamin B6.
- better vocabulary and digit memory test scores.
- higher rates of immunization against diseases.

Participation in WIC is also associated with real cost savings. For every \$1 spent by WIC on pregnant women, \$2 to \$3 is saved in Medicaid costs for newborn infants and their mothers. Today, WIC is recognized as the Nation's premier public health nutrition program.

What is my role as a WIC grocer?

The grocers who are partners in WIC are very important because they:

- help infants, children and pregnant women become healthier;
- provide convenient access to healthy foods;
- assure the integrity of the WIC program by following the procedures in this handbook.

Thank you for being a WIC partner!

Although WIC families may already shop regularly and make purchases at your grocery store, WIC food benefits can only be used to purchase specific types and quantities of foods. The foods and quantities that may be purchased are listed on the Family Food Benefit List. Families may also perform a balance inquiry transaction at the Point of Sale (POS) terminal. A balance inquiry will show the remaining benefits in the family's account.

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