

Food Insecurity- Topic of the Month

OCTOBER 1, 2025

Food insecurity occurs when a family lacks reliable access to nutritionally adequate and safe food. Families may experience food insecurity for a variety of reasons, any of which can be improved by offering support and providing resources. Read this month's topic memo for tips to support families experiencing food insecurity.

Health impact

Dietary quality is a key determinant of health outcomes. Yet for many families, unhealthy eating patterns reflect not personal choice, but the constraints imposed by food insecurity—a condition that continues to adversely affect the health of a substantial segment of the population. Families can face food insecurity for many different reasons. Losing a job or not having steady work makes it hard to afford groceries, and rising food prices only add to the struggle. High rent, utility bills, and medical costs often take up most of a family's income, leaving little left for food. In some neighborhoods, there aren't many grocery stores nearby, or families may not have reliable transportation to reach affordable places to shop. These challenges can be even harder for communities that face long-standing inequalities, like lower wages or fewer resources. On top of that, unexpected expenses—such as a car repair or childcare costs—can quickly push a family into food insecurity, making it difficult to keep healthy meals on the table.

For some, food insecurity is a short-term hardship, but for others it can be long-lasting. According to the Healthy Foods, Healthy Lives Institute [Food Security Dashboard](#), food insecurity in Minnesota has risen by 40% since early 2020. Regardless of the duration, **food insecurity can lead to poor nutrition and may impact the growth and long-term health of the entire family.**

The [Healthy People 2030](#) objective to [Reduce household food insecurity and hunger — NWS-01](#) provided a summary on the effects of food insecurity: *"Food insecurity is linked to negative health outcomes in children and adults, and it may cause children to have trouble in school. Giving more people benefits through nutrition assistance programs, increasing benefit amounts, and addressing unemployment may help reduce food insecurity and hunger."*

WIC staff play a vital role in supporting families not only with food benefits but also with education, support, and connection to resources.

Supporting families

WIC staff are more than just benefit providers—they are trusted allies who offer compassion, education, and valuable referrals that help families navigate food insecurity and build healthier futures. By prioritizing participants' immediate needs during the initial certification process,

staff can help families feel supported and create a foundation of trust that makes them more open to exploring additional resources. Once urgent needs are addressed, the focus can shift to long-term nutrition support, such as offering practical tips on healthy eating within the limits of a family's budget. Below are suggested strategies to support WIC participants when times are especially tight.

How WIC can help:

Create a welcoming environment

- Build a safe space for families to enter and greet them warmly.
- Use participant-centered language at each interaction.
- Normalize their experiences; show them they are not alone.
- Place their priorities first. It is important to understand and address the family's primary need before going forward.

If you identify food security as an issue at the certification appointment, streamline the remaining assessment to focus on resources that address the family's need to find food. If there are other identified risks, plan to address those at a future visit.

Engage families

- Provide space for the participant to bring up topics they are concerned about; "Before we get started, what health, nutrition, or other topics would you like to be sure we talk about today?"
 - Listen actively and acknowledge without judgment.
 - Use open-ended questions.
- Get curious; if a participant shares, "I don't always eat three meals a day, but I make sure my child does." Probe further to fully understand what resource may best support this family. Use the questions found in Nutrition Assessment [Tools](#) below.
 - Do you feel your family could use support from other programs for housing, utilities, or food at this time?
 - Within the past 12 months, have you worried whether your food would run out before you got money to buy more?
 - Within the past 12 months, has the food you bought run out, and you didn't have money to get more?
- Use critical thinking; watch for red flags such as skipped meals, stress about feeding self or children, lost income, home, or utilities.

Remember that the WIC food package is a value asset to families!

Maximize WIC benefits

- Teach families how to get the most out of their benefits.
 - Share the [Shopping Help](#) resource.
 - Families can access the [Affordable Flavors Meal Plan and Cook Book](#).
- Share tips for stretching WIC foods with recipes, meal planning, and storage tips.
 - [Food Tips](#)
 - **Health eKitchen** (Create an account on wichealth.org and select 'Health eKitchen Meal Planner').
 - [Real Life, Good Food](#). Families can learn tips for buying, preparing, and storing food.
 - Kids can sign up for [Rusty's Cooking Club](#) to have fun learning and talking about foods.

Many resources are available from both the [Welcome to WIC!](#) webpage in the WIC Foods section or on the MN WIC app in the shopping and nutrition sections to support families that shop for and prepare WIC foods.

Connect families to additional resources

- SNAP, local food shelves or pantries, school or summer meal programs.
- Support for health care, childcare, housing, or other household finances.
 - [Additional Support for Families](#).

Offer practical tips to utilize WIC foods

- Provide culturally relevant meal ideas using WIC foods.
- Share budget-friendly recipes using WIC foods.
 - [Recipes](#).
 - [Recipes Using Gerber Foods](#).
 - [Homemade Baby Food Recipes | Beech-Nut® Baby Food](#).
 - [Cooking Matters Recipe finder](#).
- Share strategies to reduce food waste and stretch meals.
 - [Preventing Wasted Food At Home](#).
- Encourage the family to plan meals, make a shopping list before going to the store, and buy in bulk when able.
- Discuss ways to store food properly, watch expiration dates, and use the freezer to store foods longer.

- Encourage reaching out to extended family (when it is an option); sharing meals with family is a great way to save costs and creates bonding time!

Support breastfeeding

- Share the benefits of breastfeeding.
 - Share how breastfeeding reduces reliance on formula and supports mom and baby's health, too.
- Provide information about returning to work and getting a pump.
- Offer peer support (if available in your agency).

Empower families

- Remind families that asking for help is a strength!
- Keep up to date with current resources in your community that may support families.
- Advocate for families where needed; a warm hand-off where you call a resource to help connect a family with them or walk the participant to the service area can help if it is manageable.
- Stay in the know about policies affecting food access.

Maintain a list of current resources that are available for families in your community and beyond. Do your homework, be prepared to share with participants where they can go, who they need to talk to, and what they should bring with them to ensure they get the support they need. Update this list regularly; funding cuts can affect these programs too!

Putting it into practice

Scenario: Sally came into the WIC office for a new pregnancy certification. Sally is in her fourth month of pregnancy. Sally's son Milo, who is three years old, is already certified. After taking measurements, the CPA, Jenny, noticed that Sally had not gained any weight with this pregnancy. During the assessment, Sally shared that she was laid off from her job last month, her husband is now the only one working, and money is really tight at home. Sally shared that she has had to cut out some of the foods they usually eat as a family.

Jenny: It can be tough when a family's income is reduced suddenly. Can you tell me what the change looks like at mealtimes for your family?

Sally: Most of the time, I make sure Milo eats first. I just eat what is left over.

Jenny: That sounds hard. Do you find yourself skipping meals completely?

Sally: Sometimes, but usually I just eat a smaller portion.

Jenny: I hear you. And when you do eat, how much are you usually able to have?

Sally: Just a little bit of whatever I am serving. I try to save the bigger portions for my husband and Milo.

Jenny: Thank you for being honest with me. Do you feel like you're getting the nutrition you need for you and the baby?

Sally: I'm not sure. I do try to snack a little between meals. I know I don't always get enough, but I try not to worry about that as long as my Milo is okay, and I am getting something.

Jenny: I can hear how much you care about your family. I want you to consider that your health matters too! And you are growing the next addition to your family there. If you're not well, it becomes harder to take care of yourself, the baby, and Milo.

Sally: I know... I just want to make sure my family doesn't go hungry. Milo is growing so quickly, and my husband works so hard.

Jenny: Of course. I understand that completely. You are truly the backbone of your family, and I think you are amazing.

Sally: Thank you.

Jenny: What I'd like to do is connect you with some resources—can help families with food support, so you don't have to carry this alone. Would it be okay if I shared those with you?

Sally: Yes...that would help a lot.

Jenny: Great. We'll make sure both you and Milo have what you need to be healthy. You will be getting your own food package today to help support you and the baby as well. I want to thank you for sharing your struggle with me today. It was brave of you, and I am so glad that WIC can help!

Resources

1. [Hunger Data](#) (Hunger Solutions Minnesota. 2025)
2. [Food Security and Nutrition Assistance](#) (USDA., July 24, 2025)
3. [Food Security in the U.S.](#) (USDA., Jan. 8, 2025)
4. [Food Security in the U.S. - Key Statistics & Graphics](#) (USDA. Jan. 1, 2025)

Reference- complete listing of hyperlinks:

[Food Security Dashboard](https://hfhl.umn.edu/resources/dashboardintro) (https://hfhl.umn.edu/resources/dashboardintro)

[Healthy People 2030](https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople) (https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople)

[Reduce household food insecurity and hunger — NWS-01](https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/reduce-household-food-insecurity-and-hunger-nws-01)

(https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/reduce-household-food-insecurity-and-hunger-nws-01)

[Nutrition Assessment Tools](#)

(www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/na.html#NaN)

[Shopping Help](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/shopforwic/index.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/shopforwic/index.html>)

[Affordable Flavors Meal Plan and Cook Book](https://kidseatincolor.com/minnesota-department-of-health-kids-eat-in-color/) (<https://kidseatincolor.com/minnesota-department-of-health-kids-eat-in-color/>)

[Food Tips](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/foods/tips.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/foods/tips.html>)

[wichealth.org](https://www.wichealth.org) - Create an account and select Health eKitchen Meal Planner (<https://www.wichealth.org/>)

[Real Life, Good Food](https://reallifegoodfood.umn.edu/) (<https://reallifegoodfood.umn.edu/>)

[Rusty's Cooking Club](https://reallifegoodfood.umn.edu/resources/rustys-cooking-club) (<https://reallifegoodfood.umn.edu/resources/rustys-cooking-club>)

[Welcome to WIC!](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/ppthome.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/ppthome.html>)

[Recipes](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/recipes/index.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/recipes/index.html>)

[Recipes Using Gerber Foods](https://medical.gerber.com/recipes?utm_source=Klaviyo&utm_medium=email&_kx=-9qmWPvVDaIF6YBIG__GIHb-YCSiKQ4SIwZQ_S3DLYvLKysnX_1a37qXW7qbA70.XBG24q)

(https://medical.gerber.com/recipes?utm_source=Klaviyo&utm_medium=email&_kx=-9qmWPvVDaIF6YBIG__GIHb-YCSiKQ4SIwZQ_S3DLYvLKysnX_1a37qXW7qbA70.XBG24q)

[Homemade Baby Food Recipes | Beech-Nut® Baby Food](https://www.beechnut.com/recipes/) (<https://www.beechnut.com/recipes/>)

[Cooking Matters Recipe finder](https://cookingmatters.org/recipe-finder/) (<https://cookingmatters.org/recipe-finder/>)

[Preventing Wasted Food At Home](https://www.epa.gov/recycle/preventing-wasted-food-home) (<https://www.epa.gov/recycle/preventing-wasted-food-home>)

[Food Security in the U.S.](https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us) (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us>)

[Food Security and Nutrition Assistance](https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/food-security-and-nutrition-assistance) (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/food-security-and-nutrition-assistance>)

Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 625 Robert St N, PO BOX 64975, ST PAUL MN 55164-0975; 1-800-657-3942, health.wic@state.mn.us, www.health.state.mn.us; to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.

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