

Families on food assistance buying fewer full-fat dairy products

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Credit: AI-generated image

(Medical Xpress)—Efforts to reduce consumption of saturated fat among women and young children receiving food assistance appear to be paying off, according to a study by the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity.

Purchases of whole [milk](#) and cheese have decreased among families participating in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) after the program was revised in 2009 to offer foods that better reflect dietary recommendations for Americans. The study is published in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*.

The WIC program is designed to help meet the nutritional needs of pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and young children who are at nutritional risk. Prior to the WIC food package revisions, allowances of milk and cheese exceeded dietary recommendations for dairy [consumption](#) in very [young children](#), and most milk consumed was whole milk. After the revisions, whole milk was authorized only to children under age 2, while [women](#) and older children received milk with no more than 2% milk fat. States could further restrict it to low-fat or skim milk. Cheese allowances were largely reduced too.

The Yale researchers examined milk and cheese purchases made at a New England supermarket chain by Connecticut households participating in WIC over a two-year period. Milk and cheese volume purchased by these households were compared before and after the WIC revisions.

The most significant change after the WIC revisions was replacement of whole milk with lower-fat varieties, resulting in a reduction in consumption of [saturated fat](#) from purchased milk. Prior to the revisions in Connecticut, whole milk accounted for, on average, 57% of total milk purchases and 56% of WIC milk purchases. Researchers found that this allocation changed significantly with the new WIC packages. The whole-milk share declined to 33% in total milk purchases, and 25% in WIC milk purchases. Purchases of WIC cheese using WIC benefits declined after the revisions by 77%.

The WIC revisions were not accompanied by unintended consequences, such as substantial decreases in milk purchases below recommend levels.

The authors assert that similar results from [food policy](#) changes have been seen in other products and policies. A study published in the journal *Pediatrics* examined juice purchases after the WIC revisions, and found that WIC participants purchased about 25% less 100% juice. A study recently published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* found that purchases of 100% whole-grain bread and brown rice increased among WIC participants.

"Reducing saturated fat consumption was one of the goals for revising the WIC food packages," says Tatiana Andreyeva, lead author and director of economic initiatives at the Rudd Center. "This study shows that the revisions were successful and necessary, given excessive consumption of saturated fat and calories in vulnerable populations."

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Provided by Yale University

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