SNAP Participants Appreciate Behavioral Science-Informed Nutrition Text Messages

Research Brief • September 2023

“Oh my goodness. It just made me feel like they care so much. It made it personal for me... Like a more intimate relationship with CalFresh.”

BACKGROUND

SNAP participants report a desire to eat a healthier diet, yet most consume less than the amount of fruits and vegetables (FV) recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. SNAP provides financial resources to support food purchases but does not typically provide nutrition information.

WHAT WE DID

In collaboration with the UCSD Center for Community Health, we partnered with the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency to send 5 monthly behavioral science-informed nutrition text messages to approximately 170,000 SNAP (known as CalFresh in California) participants, between October 2020-February 2021. The text messages were sent in English and Spanish and provided information about the health and other benefits of California-grown FV. Each text message included a website link specific to the fruit or vegetable mentioned in the message. For example, participants that clicked on the website link in Figure 1 were automatically sent to the kiwi landing page shown in Figure 3. The website included information about how to select, store, and prepare each FV, as well as budget-friendly recipes. This brief presents findings from an online follow-up survey with program participants (n=4,052).

KEY FINDINGS

Significant increases were found in knowing where to get information about selecting, storing, and preparing FV; feeling good about participating in SNAP; and perceptions that the SNAP program helps participants eat healthfully. No statistically significant pre-post differences were found in FV consumption, though most participants self-reported increased FV intake at follow up. Participants appreciated the information on the website, particularly the recipes. Almost all respondents appreciated the intervention and wanted it to continue (Figure 2).
CONCLUSIONS

Our findings indicate that a SNAP agency sending text messages with nutrition information is well-received and can improve diet and nutrition. Participants appreciated the intervention and many reported a desire to receive the text messages more frequently than once a month.\(^4\) Broader adoption of this approach can provide more SNAP households with information promoting a healthy diet, while improving perceptions of the SNAP program.

"I think it's really amazing. They get you these foods that you should try and recipes and let you know what to eat and how much. I just think it’s really important and I'm grateful for it."

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Figure 3. Kiwi page on project website, eat-ca.org.

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The Nutrition Policy Institute conducts evaluations of USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—formerly known as the federal Food Stamp Program—the largest program offering nutrition assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families. Highlights of our research include: understanding SNAP incentives and/or restrictions on participants’ food intake and evaluating various SNAP-Ed interventions.

References:
