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## Montana WIC Program Supports Healthy Pregnancies and Fit Kids

While mothers are traditionally honored for one Sunday in May, the Montana WIC Program works all year, providing services and benefits to pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women, infants, and children under five years. In Montana, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides food benefits to over 21,000 low-income participants per month. WIC services are offered through 27 local WIC programs, including all seven Indian reservations, across Big Sky country.

“WIC is a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) public health program designed to improve health and influence lifetime nutrition behaviors in a targeted, at-risk population,” says Chris Fogelman, RD, MPH, WIC Breastfeeding Coordinator in the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. “About half of all infants born in Montana receive WIC food benefits.”

In addition to food packages, all Montana WIC participants receive nutrition information, healthy eating tips, and breastfeeding support, as well as referrals to appropriate health and social services. WIC food packages now include whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and protein foods, in addition to the previously-approved milk, juice, cereals, legumes, and eggs. With their WIC Fruit and Vegetable Benefits, WIC families can enjoy a wide variety of fresh and frozen produce items. Thanks to WIC’s Montana Farm Direct Program, WIC fruit and vegetable benefits can also be used at farmers’ markets and/or roadside stands.

“Pregnant women need support and information for a healthy pregnancy and breastfeeding success,” notes Ms. Fogelman. Whether through the WIC program or their health care provider, mothers-to-be need practical, up-to-date advice on nutrition, fitness, and other aspects of their pregnancy, including how-to:

- **Eat plenty of delicious, nutrient-rich foods:** Good nutrition is critically important for both the health of the mother and the needs of the growing baby. USDA’s MyPyramid website has a special section for moms ([www.mypyramid.gov/mypyramidmoms/](http://www.mypyramid.gov/mypyramidmoms/)) that addresses important issues like appropriate weight gain, the use of dietary supplements, and weight loss after a pregnancy.
- **Enjoy plenty of fun physical activity:** Fitness experts agree that regular, moderate-intensity activity during pregnancy is good for moms and babies. Being active may help prevent pregnancy complications like gestational diabetes and preeclampsia, as well as reducing stress and improving mood. New research suggest that fitness may begin in the womb, since babies of active mothers tend to have healthier hearts.
- **Get plenty of restful sleep:** Women typically need more sleep during pregnancy, when eight to nine hours is normal and appropriate. Recent research suggests that getting too little - or too much - sleep can increase a woman’s risk of developing high blood pressure and even preeclampsia. Cutting back on caffeine and staying active are key ways to improve sleep patterns during pregnancy.

“Pregnant women are eager to do the right things for their baby’s health,” explains Fogelman. “Establishing healthy habits during a pregnancy can have a lifetime of benefits for mom - and the whole family!”

Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana’s monthly packets can be downloaded for free at [www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm](http://www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm)

**FIT KIDS=HAPPY KIDS: Healthy Futures for Montanans 2011**