

Changes to WIC food packages have arrived

By Shawna Coleman

Starting this month, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) food packages are getting a refresh. These changes, based on the latest nutrition science as well as feedback from WIC participants, aim to provide families with more balance and flexibility when building healthy habits.

Key changes to the food packages

More support with protein options: Canned fish will now be included in food packages for all women and children. Fish is an excellent source of omega-3 fatty acids, supporting brain and heart health. Families can also choose to replace eggs with an additional legume like beans or lentils, offering more plant-based protein options.

Wondering what to do with the fish? Here are a few ideas to try (no recipe required!)

- Mix with plain yogurt for a creamy dip
- Spread on a cracker with a drizzle of freshly squeezed lemon and olive oil
- Combine into pasta dishes to pack in the protein

Balanced nutrition with grains and dairy: Whole grains are receiving a boost, with an increased quantity for breastfeeding, pregnant and postpartum participants. Whole grains are rich in essential nutrients like fiber, B vitamins and minerals, promoting healthy digestion and maintaining steady energy levels throughout the day.

Milk quantities are now more closely aligned with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. In addition to substituting milk for cheese, participants can now substitute 2 quarts of milk for up to 2 quarts of yogurt, increasing the food package flexibility.

- Tip: Give Greek yogurt a try for an extra protein boost. Yogurt can be mixed into smoothies, eaten with granola, or topped with fresh fruit for a protein-packed snack.

Healthy start for infants: Infants can now receive fresh fruits and vegetables at 6 months of age, rather than waiting until 9 months. Parents can also now choose frozen or canned produce, in addition to fresh, to provide year-round variety and convenience.

Continued support for fruits and vegetables: Families will continue to receive monthly benefits for fruits and vegetables: \$26 for children, \$47 for pregnant and postpartum women, and \$52 for breastfeeding women. There's also a new option to exchange juice for an additional \$3 in fruits and vegetables, giving families more flexibility to customize their food packages.

- Tip: Explore different fruits and vegetables through the year. In the wintertime, fruits and vegetables like apples, carrots, grapefruit, pineapples and winter squash are in season. Frozen and canned fruits and vegetables are also WIC approved if fresh options are not in season.

Making the most of the changes

The WIC Shopper app makes it easy to navigate these updates. WIC participants can check their balance, explore recipes and stay up to date with what's new. In addition to the changes listed above, the WIC food package will continue to provide foods including eggs, cereals, 100% fruit juice and a range of other foods.

Are you interested in signing up for WIC food benefits? If you are pregnant or are caring for a child under the age of 5, you may be qualified to receive these benefits. Anyone on Montana Medicaid, SNAP, TANF or Best Beginnings will qualify. If you are not on these programs, you may still qualify for services. Contact WIC at 406-247-3370, wic@riverstonehealth.org or go to RiverStoneHealth.org/WIC learn more.

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