

# Target Marketing: Topic of the Month

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Making nutritious food choices is one of the most important ways to ensure optimal growth and lifelong health for our WIC participants. WIC offers a variety of supplemental foods along with education and resources to help participants make informed choices on what they serve to their family and put into their bodies. One factor that influences participants' eating habits is targeted marketing.

## Target marketing

Target marketing is the process of focusing on specific groups or populations to increase the sales of certain products or services. It is done by creating ads that attract specific people, usually based on age, gender, education, occupation, income-level, or household type.

With increased digital advertising, companies can narrow their marketing down to the individual customer or household to influence buying patterns with attractive statements, catchy jingles, colorful pictures, and celebrity-filled ads. Marketed products seen on television in shows, movies, and ads, on the internet in pop-ups, in stores, on billboards, and in restaurants impact the food choices families make.

## Examples of target marketing

- A cereal box brand covered in the latest cartoon character with a prize inside, targeting young children.
- An instant meal brand that claims it is a “good source of fiber & made with whole grains”, targeting families.
- The latest superstar showed eating a yogurt brand before arriving at the Grammys, targeting adults.
- The “100% juice” brand that comes in a pull-top bottle shaped like a mermaid, targeting young children.

## Effects on population health

Exposure to the marketing of certain foods has been shown to increase the intake of high-calorie and low-nutrient-dense foods, leading to increased rates of adverse health conditions in adults and children. Unfortunately, children are more vulnerable to the effects of target marketing, and since many families shop together, they tend to influence their parents' buying patterns as well.

Many of the foods marketed to children are of poor nutritional quality. The top three food sources marketed to children are fast foods, beverages, and breakfast cereals. Children in

lower-income families are disproportionately targeted by many of these advertisements. These same children often already experience an inadequate intake of many important nutrients, leading to poor health, cognitive deficits, and behavioral problems. Additionally, there is a greater focus on marketing that targets children of color; these ads work by promoting products to specific communities that result in further compromising their health.

With such an expansive and focused marketing reach, how can we support our participants to make healthy choices that include purchasing and using their WIC-allowed foods?

### Supporting families

WIC can support families exposed to target marketing by encouraging them to learn more about the foods they are purchasing and recognize when something looks or sounds too good to be true. Encouraging families to maintain an active, healthy lifestyle with regular family mealtimes, daily activity, and limiting screen time will ensure they are keeping the focus on their health. Below are some reminders to give to participants.

- **Look at the content:** Monitor the media that children consume and the games they play.
- **Discussion time:** Talk about the ads for foods that children see and explore what is healthy and what is not.
- **Take a screen ‘time-out’:** Limit time spent on TV, video games, tablet, computer, or cell phone.
- **Lead by example:** Shop, cook, and discuss healthy food choices together.
- **Eat healthy:** Create healthy eating habits by cooking and eating together as a family.
- **Stay active:** Find ways to get daily activity through indoor and outdoor playtime together.

### WIC food package

The changes made to the WIC food package over the years have brought improvements in the availability of healthy foods, making it easier for families with limited transportation to shop locally. The tools available to participants give them the support to shop for and use WIC foods right at their fingertips. Despite this, the redemption of WIC benefits has fluctuated. For staff, understanding which foods participants are or are not purchasing is an important part of how we educate participants.

[Help participants use benefits.](#) Explaining the benefits of the foods offered on the WIC food package and how to access them can directly affect the redemption and utilization of benefits. Below are some things to consider that will help participants get the most out of their WIC food package.

### Helping participants

- Read through the list of available foods in their WIC food package; use visuals whenever possible.

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- Ask which foods the participant is most interested in.
- Take the time to talk about the benefits of the various foods.
- Share tips and recipes for using different foods or food groups.
- Suggest making a plan for the shopping trip ahead of time.
  - Creating a list of WIC foods and ingredients needed for a recipe can help.
- Discuss how to identify and select the appropriate food items at the store, such as how to identify 32 oz. low-fat yogurt from all the other products on the shelf.
- Remind participants to pay for their WIC foods separately.
  - Save SNAP, cash, or other payment methods for those non-WIC foods.

### Conversation starters

When discussing WIC foods, it may be helpful to ask participants what influences their decision to purchase certain items over others. Staff can use open-ended questions to ask participants about the use of foods on the WIC food package at each nutrition education contact. Below are some examples to ask about and encourage the use of WIC-allowed foods.

- “How have you enjoyed using the foods in your food package?”
- “What questions do you have about the different foods available to you with WIC?”
- “What foods were you looking to purchase but could not find, or maybe they weren’t available?”
- “Tell me what information I could share to help you shop for and use the (cereal, beans, or infant meats) on your food package?”
- “What would you say makes you choose one cereal over another?”
- “Tell me more about how you incorporate your WIC foods into your daily meals.”

**For participants:** Using the [Minnesota WIC App](#) will assist participants in shopping for and using their WIC foods.

**For staff:** The [Help Participants Use Benefits](#) page has activities for evaluating WIC benefit redemption and utilization, both at the local agency level and the individual household level.

### Staff Exercise

Education-based marketing is another strategy that involves sharing knowledge to generate trust from your ‘target audience’ to promote a product or service. At WIC, we can use our knowledge and resources to build trust with participants and promote the healthy foods provided on the WIC food package.

Complete the exercise steps below to build your knowledgebase with a variety of tips to share with participants to promote various WIC-allowed foods.

## Tips

- To find ideas about using specific foods
  - [Quick Tips for CPAs](#)
- For ideas to help participants get the most out of their food package with recipes, videos, and tips.
  - [WIC Recipes](#)
  - [Recipes, Cookbooks and Recipe Videos](#)
  - [Affordable Flavors Meal Plan and Cook Book](#)
  - [wichealth.org](http://wichealth.org): Create an account and select **Health eKitchen Meal Planner**

## Exercise #1

1. Choose one food group and read through the [Quick Tips for CPAs](#) for that food group.
2. What questions would you ask to get the participant talking about this food group?

### Examples:

- Tell me about the time you ate this food.
  - Share with me how your family felt about this food.
  - What resources would help you to use this food in your meal planning?
3. Identify ways to incorporate this food group at meal or snack times.

### Examples:

- Packaging WIC foods (fun cups, reusable individual serving size containers, meal prep, using leftovers).
  - Making shapes or faces with foods.
  - Having a 'food of the week'; try in one or two different ways and discuss together as a family.
4. What ideas do you have for promoting this food to WIC participants?

### Examples:

- Sharing recipes
- Coloring pages
- Pictures of the people enjoying this food on the wall.

## Exercise #2

1. Do a search on Google for 'WIC Foods Recipes' or 'WIC Baby Food Recipes'. What did you find?

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### Examples:

- [Pinterest](#)
- [Dr. Yum Project](#)
- Cookbooks from other State's WIC Agencies.

2. Pick one recipe to try at home and then discuss it with other staff.

### Examples:

- Do you like the recipe?
- How easy/difficult was it?
- Would you recommend others try this recipe?

3. What ways can you share this and other recipe ideas with WIC participants?

### Examples:

- Give them a paper copy.
- Share a link.
- Share a picture of the food you made.
- Ask participants to bring back pictures of the food they made.

4. What ways can you get participants excited to try new foods?

### Examples:

- With fun recipes.
- Encouraging family preparation of food.
- Pick one WIC food, place it in the center of the table, and talk together about what that food looks like, tastes like, and feels like.

## Resources

[Fact Sheet- Food Advertising and Marketing to Children 2019](#) (April 9, 2019, American Heart Association)

[Kids' Everyday Exposure to Food Marketing](#) (January 22, 2017, International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity)

[Making WIC Work Better Full Report](#) (May 2019, Food Research & Action Center (FRAC))

[WIC Works: Addressing the Nutrition and Health Needs of Low-Income Families](#) (January 27, 2021, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities)

[Infographic: The WIC Food Package: From Then to Now](#) (2017 Report, The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine)

## Reference – complete listing of hyperlinks

### [Help Participants Use Benefits](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/benefithelp.html)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/benefithelp.html>)

### [Minnesota WIC App](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/infosystem/hubert/mnwicapp/index.html)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/infosystem/hubert/mnwicapp/index.html>)

### [Quick Tips for CPAs](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/fpmaterials.html#quicktips)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/fpmaterials.html#quicktips>)

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

[Recipes, Cookbooks and Recipe Videos](https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/resources/recipes-cookbooks-and-recipe-videos) (<https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/resources/recipes-cookbooks-and-recipe-videos>)

[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/>)

[wichealth.org](https://www.wichealth.org/) (<https://www.wichealth.org/>)

[Pinterest](https://www.pinterest.com/sandiegowic/wic-foods-recipes/?autologin=true) (<https://www.pinterest.com/sandiegowic/wic-foods-recipes/?autologin=true>)

[Dr. Yum Project](https://recipes.doctoryum.org/en/tags/wic-food-package) (<https://recipes.doctoryum.org/en/tags/wic-food-package>)

[Fact Sheet- Food Advertising and Marketing to Children 2019](https://www.heart.org/-/media/files/about-us/policy-research/fact-sheets/healthy-schools-and-childhood-obesity/food-marketing-and-advertising-to-children-fact-sheet.pdf?la=en) (<https://www.heart.org/-/media/files/about-us/policy-research/fact-sheets/healthy-schools-and-childhood-obesity/food-marketing-and-advertising-to-children-fact-sheet.pdf?la=en>)

### [Kids' Everyday Exposure to Food Marketing](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RREG2QUGGIU)

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[Making WIC Work Better Full Report](https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Making-WIC-Work-Better-Full-Report.pdf) (<https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Making-WIC-Work-Better-Full-Report.pdf>)

### [WIC Works: Addressing the Nutrition and Health Needs of Low-Income Families](https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/wic-works-addressing-the-nutrition-and-health-needs-of-low-income-families)

(<https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/wic-works-addressing-the-nutrition-and-health-needs-of-low-income-families>)

### [Infographic: The WIC Food Package: From Then to Now](https://www.nap.edu/visualizations/wic-food-packages/)

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