

DEMOGRAPHIC, PSYCHOSOCIAL, AND EDUCATIONAL FACTORS RELATED TO
FRUIT AND VEGETABLE CONSUMPTION IN ADULTS

By

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(ABSTRACT)

Recent global statistics estimate 20% of all cancer incidence could be prevented if Americans would modify their eating habits to increase fruit and vegetable intake to the minimum recommended level of five servings daily. Educational strategies to change eating behavior would benefit from a greater understanding of psychosocial and demographic factors related dietary behavior.

Secondary analysis of a nationally representative survey of 2655 adults was completed to assess differences between low-income and high-income adults in psychosocial, demographic, and educational factors related to fruit and vegetable intake. Significant differences in self-efficacy, awareness/knowledge, and cost and availability of fruits and vegetables were found between the low-income and high-income groups. In the low-income group, 37% of the variance in total fruit and vegetable consumption was explained by psychosocial and demographic factors, with demographics, self-efficacy and awareness/knowledge being the most significant predictors. In the high-income group, 34% of the variance in total fruit and vegetable consumption was explained by psychosocial and demographic factors, with self-efficacy alone accounting for 14% of the variance.

This research suggests that, regardless of income category, social cognitive factors, in particular self-efficacy and knowledge/awareness of the health message, are stronger predictors of fruit and vegetable consumption than are perceived barrier factors. Given the weaknesses of the survey instrument, the findings need to be interpreted with caution. Policy inferences can be suggested from this research, but would need further research findings before implementation of nutrition policy recommendations.

The implications of these research findings are that nutrition education interventions to increase fruit and vegetable consumption should be aimed at affecting those psychosocial factors that are predictive of behavior change. In particular, differences by income level between psychosocial, education, and behavior responses underscore the need for tailoring educational interventions by income group for greater impact.

The most relevant psychosocial predictors of fruit and vegetable consumption in adults are self-efficacy, awareness/knowledge of the health message, social support, and weak intent. The most relevant demographic predictors were smoking status, educational level, and age. Income level appears to share variance with other demographic variables and should be explored in further research.

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