



ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES (ADHS)/  
ARIZONA NUTRITION NETWORK (AZNN)  
BEHAVIOR MODEL TRIADS  
RESEARCH REPORT

REPORT PREPARED FOR:  
ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES / AZNN

DATE: April 2008

## Table of Contents

I.	BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY.....	3
II.	KEY FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS.....	5
III.	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.....	8
	A. EATING PATTERNS - CURRENT DIET VS. "IDEAL HEALTHY DIET" .....	8
	B. HEALTHY/UNHEALTHY EATING .....	11
	1. DEFINE "HEALTHY EATING" .....	11
	2. FAMILIARITY WITH MYPYRAMID.....	13
	3. HEALTHY EATING; BENEFITS & BARRIERS.....	14
	i. BENEFITS .....	14
	ii. BARRIERS .....	17
	4. UNHEALTHY EATING; ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES .....	23
	i. ADVANTAGES .....	23
	ii. DISADVANTAGES .....	25
	5. FAMILY'S INFLUENCE ON EATING HABITS.....	27
	C. PERCEIVED THREAT OR RISK OF CONDITION/DISEASE.....	29
	1. FAMILY HISTORY .....	29
	D. FAMILY MEALS .....	32
	E. SELF-EFFICACY .....	34

Appendix:

SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

DISCUSSION GUIDE

FOOD DIARY FORM

## I. Background & Methodology

The Arizona Nutrition Network (AzNN), a public and private partnership led by the Arizona Department of Health Services' Bureau of USDA Nutrition Programs, was developed to educate all Arizonans, especially lower income residents, on the importance of nutrition and physical activity. The organization's mission is to shape food consumption in a positive way, promote healthy behaviors, and reduce disease among specific target groups – in this case, food stamp applicants and participants living in Arizona. AzNN accomplishes this by promoting basic, consistent messages that help the target audience choose diets rich in nutrients, which include consumption of fruits and vegetables, drinking 1% low fat and fat free milk, and eating healthy meals and portion sizes.

In an effort to evaluate their target audience using two health behavior models (the *Transtheoretical Model* and the *Health Belief Model*) and further tailor their intervention messages, ADHS/AzNN commissioned WestGroup to conduct both qualitative and quantitative research. This research will provide a framework for understanding individuals' psychological readiness or intention to take action related to the three health messages.

The subject of this report is the qualitative portion of the research. For this phase, WestGroup conducted 12 mini focus groups (six in English and six in Spanish) with women in the target audience. Participants were encouraged to open-up and talk about their rational decisions to eat/not eat fruits and veggies, drink/not drink 1% low fat or fat free milk, and participate/not participate in family meals and, perhaps more importantly, the emotions behind their decisions.

Although these groups were originally designed to be triads - an interviewer and three respondents – most of the sessions included four or five participants. (*Note: Six participants were recruited for each triad, with the expectation that three would show. However, we had a very good show rate with most of the groups and decided to take all of those who made the effort to be there.*) Six groups were conducted in Phoenix and six in Tucson.

To assure that we spoke with the target audience, WestGroup recruiters recruited participants from the WIC offices where the groups were held. In addition, we used a database that includes Spanish-speaking people for the Phoenix groups. Qualified participants were given specifics on the date, time, and location of the appropriate discussion group.

The following table lists the locations of the groups and the number of total participants in each city:

Location Address	English	Spanish	Focus Group Date
Phoenix/Maryvale 4002 N. 67 <sup>th</sup> Avenue	13	15	April 7
Tucson 4500 N. Old Romero Road	12	15	March 26

The group discussions lasted approximately 1½ hours. Participants were given \$40 and a goodie bag provided by ADHS as a “thank you.”

Each participant completed a brief questionnaire, which was provided by ADHS, upon arriving at the focus group. Results of this questionnaire are not included in this report.

## II. Key Findings & Conclusions

- **Current food diaries reflect a wide variety of tastes, habits, and preferences.** Participants' accounts of their previous day's meals included skipping meals, eating junk and fast food, drinking energy drinks in place of meals, and eating healthy, home-cooked meals.
  - *Women in the Spanish-speaking groups were much more likely to consider lunch (comida) the main meal of the day, and identified soups, stews with meat and vegetables, veal steak, chicken, and meat balls as typical mid-day menus. These women often said they had cereal for dinner.*
- **The majority – although not everyone - has a good idea of the “ideal healthy meal plan.”** It often includes fruit, eggs, and juice for breakfast, sandwiches or a salad for lunch, and meat, chicken, or fish (grilled, broiled, or baked, but not fried) for dinner. Most participants recommended veggies with dinner, and water all day long. Spanish-speaking women often suggested grilled chicken or fish, steamed vegetables, rice, and vegetable soup or stew for a healthy lunch, and cereal for dinner.
- **Fruits and veggies are almost always the first items mentioned when asked which foods should be included in a healthy diet.** Chicken, fish, lean meat, beans, rice, water, and milk were also near the top of the list.
  - *In addition to specific foods that should and should not be included, some participants advised having four or five small meals throughout the day, while others said it's important to have breakfast, and still others that it is not good to eat late at night.*
- **Most participants are familiar with the old food guide pyramid, rather than MyPyramid.** Many women are able to name some of the food groups included on the graphic, but few can name them all. And, although they say the tool is generally useful, very few refer to it for meal planning.
- **Disease prevention and better overall health are the most important benefits of a healthy diet.** When asked about the specific conditions or diseases they could avoid, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, problems with your digestive system, diabetes, and

heart disease were mentioned most frequently. Several women also mentioned that their unborn or nursing babies would be healthier if they themselves eat healthy foods.

- *In addition to health-related benefits, these women identified several other advantages to eating healthy, including being a role model for their children, feeling better about themselves because they are giving their families a healthy meal, having more control over seasonings and the amount of fat meals contain, and enjoying food that tastes better.*
- **Time is the biggest barrier to eating healthy.** This can mean several different things. For some, it is the time it takes to plan, shop, prepare, and clean up after a healthy, home-cooked meal, which, they say, takes up to two hours. This is time they could be spending with the kids, or more likely, doing other chores (e.g., cleaning and laundry), or resting. For others, it's the lack of time. Their lives are so busy with work, school, kids, and housework, they say they simply don't have the time to prepare a meal for their families. It can also mean their schedules are such that they only have a limited amount of time between classes, jobs, school, after school activities, etc., so picking something up from McDonald's on the way from one activity to the next, is the only way they will eat.
  - *A number of participants seemed as frustrated with meal planning as with the actual preparation. The need to determine what fresh fruits and vegetables are in season, find a recipe that all of their family members will like, know what stores are having specials, and find the time to grocery shop is overwhelming. So, many will resort to pulling a pizza out of the freezer or taking the family to a fast food restaurant.*
- **Food preferences, cost, tradition or culture, being lazy, or simply not having the willpower are also barriers.** Because family members like different things, some moms feel they "have to" cook different things. This takes more time and can be frustrating. Others, primarily those in the Spanish-speaking groups, say they have always eaten a particular way and it's very hard to change their habits. This seems to be particularly true on weekends and holidays when families get together to celebrate. A few participants admit to just being lazy or not having the willpower to stick to a healthy diet.

- **Cost was a barrier to healthy eating for some but not for others.**  
Although there were some participants who said it is expensive to buy healthy food, there were just as many who said eating fast food is expensive.
  - *Access to fresh fruits and vegetables was not a barrier for these participants.*
  
- **Many of these women are heavily influenced by the food preferences of their families.** These women often cater to the likes and dislikes of their family members. These preferences not only affect what they prepare for their families, but their own diet as well.
  
- **Convenient, easy, and fast are the major advantages of fast food or “junk food.”** Getting sick is the biggest disadvantage of not eating healthy. This includes both short-term and long-term illnesses and conditions.
  
- **Opinions were mixed on whether or not having a family member with one of these diseases necessarily means they are at a higher risk of getting the disease.** A few said the fact that someone in their family had a particular disease had already caused them to modify their eating habits, while others didn't think there was a connection.
  - *That said, many of these illnesses are perceived to happen to “older people,” or are potential problems “down the road.” For the majority, these are not immediate threats.*
  
- **Many sit down as a family to have dinner several times a week.** They consider this a great time to catch up with family members, hear stories about their kids' school day, and “make memories.” The most frequently mentioned reason for not having family meals was mom's or dad's work schedule.
  
- **Most participants feel they can eat more fruits and vegetables (particularly, fruits),** but fewer feel as confident about switching from whole or 2% milk to 1% low fat or fat free milk.
  - *Several women report having changed their diets in the past six months and had a variety of reasons for doing so. As mentioned, a few have family members with a particular disease, so felt they needed to change before they ended up like the family member. Others have changed to control their weight.*

### III. SUMMARY of Findings

#### A. EATING PATTERNS - CURRENT DIET vs. "Ideal Healthy Diet"

Prior to any discussion, participants were asked to complete a brief "food diary." In one part of the diary, they were asked to write down what they had for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks (including liquids) "yesterday." In the other part of the diary, participants were asked to develop the "ideal healthy" food plan for one day. It was further explained that they should write down the food they would eat and the liquids they would drink "if they had the luxury of having the perfect, healthy diet for one day."

Current food diaries reflect a wide variety of tastes, habits, and preferences. Participants' reports included skipping meals, eating junk and fast food, drinking energy drinks in place of meals, and preparing home cooked meals every day. Traditional breakfast food, including cereal, eggs, toast, pancakes, yogurt, fruit, coffee, milk, and juice were all mentioned frequently when asked about what they have for breakfast. Those in the Spanish-speaking groups added tortillas, quesadillas, black beans, and chorizo. Salads, sandwiches, tacos, and quesadillas as well as fast food items including pizza, burgers, and sub sandwiches, were mentioned often when talking about lunch. Chicken, fish, meat, veggies, rice, and beans, and among Spanish-speaking women, cereal, are among the popular dinner items.

Women in the Spanish-speaking groups were much more likely to consider lunch (*comida*) the main meal of the day and identified soups, stews with meat and vegetables, veal steak, chicken, and meat balls as typical mid-day menus. These women often said they had cereal for dinner, because it is light, easy to prepare, and healthy (because it has vitamins and you eat it with milk).

#### Participant Comments:

*I will have toast or oatmeal or pancakes sometimes, but it's usually just coffee and toast. For lunch yesterday, I ate pizza. For dinner, I had chili cheese fries and a strawberry shake. During the day, I had water and Gatorade to drink.*

*For breakfast I had two eggs, two pieces of toast and a glass of orange juice. Lunch, I didn't have time for lunch. I was busy. We did takeout Chinese food for dinner. I had some soda and some popcorn to snack on.*

*Nothing for breakfast except a Dr. Pepper. For lunch I had two slices of pizza and another Dr. Pepper! For dinner I had an Eege's pastrami sandwich with cheese and a bottle of water, and I had some candy for a snack.*

*I had homemade flaxseed pancakes with melons for breakfast. For lunch I had a turkey sandwich with olives. For dinner my husband made some kind of rice with vegetables and pork chops and eggs and put it all together.*

*I had a cinnamon roll and a cup of milk for breakfast. For lunch I had a bean burrito, a half-cup of salad, two little cookies, and a 16-ounce water bottle. For dinner I had a chicken leg and chicken wing, half a cup of salad, half a cup of beans, half a cup of rice, and another 16-ounce water bottle. (S)*

*For breakfast I had one egg, tortillas and a quesadilla. For lunch we had a family thing and so we made carne asada with a whole bunch of guacamole on the side. For drinks we always drink soda. We can't live without soda! For dinner my mom made enchiladas and we drank soda also. (S)*

*For breakfast I had meat taquitos, for lunch cocido (stew made with meat, peas, and vegetables), and for dinner, tostadas with carne asada. (S)*

When asked about the "ideal healthy diet," responses were not as diverse. Many suggested fruit, eggs, and juice for breakfast, sandwiches or a salad for lunch, and meat, chicken, or fish (grilled, broiled, or baked, but not fried) for dinner. Most suggested veggies with dinner, and water all day long. Spanish-speaking women often suggested grilled chicken or fish, steamed vegetables, rice, and vegetable soup or stew for a healthy lunch, and cereal for dinner.

#### Participant Comments:

*For breakfast it would be either oatmeal or cereal with half a grapefruit or grapes and milk or water to drink. Lunch should be sandwich with apples, salad, juice or water and for dinner, it would be steak, Brussels sprouts, potatoes and salad with milk or juice, and for a snack, it would be any kind of fruit.*

*For breakfast I put eggs, turkey bacon, wheat toast, juice. Lunch, turkey wraps, cut up vegetables and milk. Dinner, I put vegetables,*

*baked chicken and rice. Snacks, yogurt and cheese stick, fruit, granola.*

*For breakfast I put eggs, toast, juice, milk. For lunch it would be a sandwich with cheese and a fruit salad. Dinner would be tacos with beans, cheese, tomatoes and lettuce. For snacks it would be fruit and vegetables.*

*For breakfast I wrote down a bowl of corn flakes with half a banana and milk. For lunch I would do a grilled chicken fajita on a wheat pita with lettuce and tomatoes. For dinner I would make myself a tuna salad, but I wouldn't add any mayonnaise. I would only use lemon, and then I would put in some tomatoes, cilantro, onions, avocados, and I would put it on crackers. I would snack on apples, oranges, or bananas, and then I would drink water all day long.*

*(The ideal breakfast includes) fiber cereal, low fat milk and fruit - bananas and grapes. (S)*

*(My ideal food for lunch) is chicken with broccoli or just with pepper and lemon. (S)*

*Ideal dinner for me is fruit, or also cereal, or toast with milk. (S)*

*Examples of less healthy meals (when asked about "ideal healthy diet")*

*Two eggs, sausage, hash browns*

*Bread, cheese, eggs*

*Two eggs, bacon, hash browns, orange juice*

## B. Healthy / Unhealthy Eating

### 1. Define “Healthy Eating”

Participants were asked to define “healthy eating.” Which foods should be included and which should be excluded? They were asked about the importance of variety, portion sizes, and when meals are eaten.

Fruits and veggies were often the first items mentioned when asked which foods should be included in a healthy diet. Chicken, fish, lean meat, beans, rice, water, and milk were also near the top of the list. Some, but not all women, specifically identified 1% low fat or fat free milk.

Sweets, sodas, candy, and other “junk food” were identified most frequently when asked about foods that would not appear on a “healthy eating” plan. Most agreed these foods should be eaten in moderation. Fried and fatty foods, as well as foods with too much salt or sugar, were also included on the unhealthy foods list.

**Table 1: Healthy Eating**

Healthy Foods	Unhealthy Foods
Fruits	Candy
Vegetables	Soda
Wheat bread (instead of white)	Fast food
Water	Chips
Fish	Chocolate
Chicken	Sweets
Meat	Artificial coloring and flavoring
Skim milk	Fried foods
Natural juices	Fatty foods
Grains	White bread
Beans	Too much salt
Lentils	Sugary cereals
Cheese	
Eggs	
Steamed rice	

In addition to specific foods that should and should not be included, participants discussed the time of day and frequency of meals, as well as portion sizes, in their definition of healthy eating. Some advised having four or five small meals throughout the day rather than eating two or three big meals. Others said it is important to have breakfast, while still others

said it is not good to eat late at night. Most participants agree variety is important; however, this was not mentioned until prompted.

Participant Comments:

*It's good to eat in the morning. That's the best time to eat.*

*It's not good to eat in the middle of the night.*

*(Variety is important) because your body needs more than just the same thing for nutrition and different vitamins.*

*I try to cook, one day to grill with no fat, the next day a stew with no fat, another day maybe just a little. (S)*

*I have heard that we should eat various times per day. The ideal is to eat four – five times a day because they are small portions as opposed to two big portions for the whole day. (S)*

*You accelerate your metabolism the more you eat. You are less hungry if you eat every three hours; you eat less than when you don't eat for six hours. Then you stuff yourself with whatever. (S)*

## 2. Familiarity with MyPyramid

Most participants indicated they were familiar with the food pyramid, although the majority was familiar with the old food guide pyramid, rather than the newer MyPyramid. (Both versions were shown to the groups.) They explained they had seen the symbol in WIC clinics, doctors' offices, schools, and on food packages. While several named some of the food groups included on the graphic, few named all of them, and very few could give any more specific information about the tool (e.g., serving size recommendations, the exercise component, specific recommendations within the food groups). And, although most agree the symbol is generally useful, only a couple said they refer to it for guidance in meal planning.

### Participant Comments:

*At least it gives you an idea about knowing what we're supposed to eat.*

*There are the dairy products, meat products, and the vegetable products.*

*(The food pyramid is outdated) because they've discovered so much more and that it's not the best way for people to eat healthy. With the Mediterranean diets, they tend to find less obesity in people that follow that diet because it's more well rounded.*

*(It's) like a varied diet that includes grains, vegetables, fruits, proteins, fats, milk, eggs. (S)*

*The only change I have noticed is that before it was horizontal and now they have it vertical. (S)*

*Before the milk, cheese, eggs were on top and it would start to go down, on one side were grains, rice, and whole wheat bread. (S)*

### 3. Healthy Eating: Benefits & Barriers

#### i. Benefits

Participants identified a long list of benefits to eating healthy, with feeling better overall and disease prevention topping the list. Specifically, women mention having more energy, being in a better mood, and being more focused and alert when asked about why they feel better. Many of these women also said they won't gain weight if they eat healthy, with several saying their skin and hair will look healthier.

Participants were also quick to mention that people get sick less often if they follow a healthy diet. When asked about the specific conditions or diseases they could avoid, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, problems with your digestive system, diabetes, and heart disease were mentioned most frequently. Several women also mentioned that their unborn or nursing babies would be healthier if they themselves eat healthy foods.

In addition to health-related benefits, these women identified several other benefits to eating healthy, among them: being a role model for their children, feeling better about themselves because they are giving their families a healthy meal, having more control over seasonings and the amount of fat meals contain, and enjoying food that tastes better, or as one participant put it, "more alive."

**Table 2: Perceived Benefits of a Healthy Diet**

<b>Health Related Benefits</b>	
<u>Short-term benefits to overall health:</u> Fewer colds, flu More energy/active More focused and alert Won't gain weight Better for you during pregnancy/ breastfeeding Better mood/less cranky/irritable Healthy skin Shiny hair Higher self-esteem	<u>Long-term benefits to overall health:</u> Longer life Age less quickly Less illness/less likely to get sick (obesity, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high blood sugar) Less tooth decay Don't break bones

### Other Benefits

Role model for young kids/getting kids to develop habits early  
Greater variety of foods  
Taste – “fresh foods taste more alive”  
When you make a meal for your family you just feel right and it’s special.  
More control over fat content/ seasonings  
More variety than fast food

Participant Comments:

#### Health-related

*It will keep you from getting. . . diabetes, heart disease, tooth decay, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, some cancers, osteoporosis, and varicose veins.*

*There are long-term benefits for your heart, blood pressure, and all of that is good just from healthy eating.*

*You would be alert and active. Your reflexes will become faster and you will be more flexible.*

*For me right now I’m breastfeeding, so I feel like I should eat healthy because I’m breastfeeding. (S)*

*You don’t really gain too much weight when you eat healthy food. (S)*

*You have more energy throughout the day to help be more balanced. (S)*

*You won’t have to see the doctor as much for things like high blood pressure. (S)*

#### Other

*The taste is very intense, like more than fast food. The fruit is more intense. You can taste the healthiness of it.*

*When you cook it yourself you have more control over the fat content than if it comes from the restaurant.*

*Even though it takes all that time to prepare, I feel good about myself because I know I'm making them a good dinner.*

*It would save you money on fast food places. Also, you control what goes into your body more and the portion sizes. When you eat out, you can't really tell how much you are putting into your body. It also teaches your kids good eating habits. It teaches them to eat things like good fruits. These are long lasting habits that will follow them throughout their lifetime. (S)*

**ii. Barriers**

Participants have myriad reasons for not eating healthy at every meal, but the barrier they mentioned most frequently was *time*. They are busy with children, household chores, work, and school, and shopping, preparing, eating, and cleaning up after meals takes time. These women estimate that it takes up to two hours for the whole process. In contrast, many say they can pick up fast food in a matter of 10 to 15 minutes. And, they can incorporate this into their busy schedules more easily by grabbing some chips, a candy bar, or a fast food meal while “on the run.”

While many say they simply don't have the time to cook meals, others say they are too tired at the end of a long work day and don't feel like grocery shopping, cooking, and cleaning up. Still others say they would rather use this time to do other chores or spend it with their families.

**Table 3: Perceived Barriers to a Healthy Diet**

<p><u>Time-related barriers:</u>  Meal planning  Finding recipes  Planning, shopping, preparing, washing dishes - time-consuming  Time to prepare - 30 minutes to 2 hours (could spend this time with family, doing other chores)  Spend time cooking and child/family doesn't like - frustrating and depressing  Not everyone is hungry at the same time  Family/kids have different schedules, easier to pick something up when going between activities (work, school, after school, etc.)</p>	<p><u>“Harder” to eat healthy:</u>  Too tired after full day  Don't want to argue with kids/give them what they want  Family members don't like the same thing  “Easy way out”  Kids don't like veggies, other healthy food  Run out of ideas/recipes</p> <p><u>Cost:</u>  Cost - can be expensive  Must pay attention to seasons, specials  Throw away fruits and veggies that have gone bad</p> <p><u>Other:</u>  Doesn't taste good  Gets boring  Can't find some produce</p>
---	--

Participant Comments:

*I think that is the main thing that stops everybody from eating as healthy as they should is it's not as easy to go with it. With kids you have to be able to go!*

*By the time you're cooking breakfast, lunch, and dinner for all of your family, you add that times three and it gets to be a lot.*

*To prepare a meal you need different things so you have to go to the store and get everything and then come back and prepare everything. It takes a lot of time. We just find the easy way out.*

*Eating healthy takes longer; you have to dice the vegetables, combine the ingredients . . . (S)*

Food preferences also prevent some families from eating healthy meals. Several moms said their family members like different things, so they “have to” prepare several items. This is not only time-consuming, but can be exhausting and frustrating. One mother explained that she has to cut up fruit or her child won't eat it. When she does, her child loves it, but the little boy won't eat an apple, orange, or banana unless it is cut up.

Other moms, whose kids don't like healthy foods, will serve them frozen pizza or just let them eat what they want, rather than argue with them. A few moms said that it's frustrating and even depressing when they spend time cooking a healthy meal and the kids don't like it, especially when they know it would make their kids happy to go to McDonald's, Burger King, or Sonic.

Participant Comments:

*She's like, “I don't like it!” I'll try to kind of manipulate the situation to where maybe I can try to make her, well, not make her, have her eat it. But most of the time it doesn't work out anyways! So, instead of sitting there and arguing with her, I'll just be like, “Okay. I'll make you something else,” or, “What do you want?”*

*It's harder trying to find out what to make him because he likes eggs, toast; he likes cereal but he won't eat a lot of the other foods. He doesn't like veggies or fruit. It's hard trying to satisfy what he needs.*

*Then my daughter likes everything but not my son. For example, if we have vegetables she wants steamed vegetables, my son wants fried vegetables. My daughter wants fish but my son wants fried fish.*

*He loves fruit and vegetables, but in order for him to eat more fruit, I have to cut it up.*

*Oh, I feel like I want to die! I go, "Well, you're going to eat it because I say. You have to eat it because I took two hours fixing it for you!" (S)*

A number of participants seemed as frustrated with meal planning as with the actual preparation. The need to determine what fresh fruits and vegetables are in season, find a recipe that all of their family members will like, know what stores are having specials, and find the time to grocery shop is overwhelming. Several said they don't have enough good recipes or they don't know what to prepare that will be healthy and something everyone in the family will like. Similarly, a few admitted they don't know how to prepare food so it will taste good to them and/or to their children.

#### Participant Comments:

*The hardest thing for me is having to plan my meals for the week. That includes the shopping and figuring out what recipes to make each day. You have to plan that out, otherwise you end up going to the grocery store every day pretty much, which I pretty much do.*

*I know how to cook a lot of things, but there comes that moment when you ask yourself "Now what?"*

*Basically I don't think we take the time to research what we can do to make things taste better that we cook. We don't do that. We just go to McDonald's instead. (S)*

*Yes, you have to think about what you are going to combine it with. Do I have to make a salad? Or accompany it with rice. Or cook it with oil, fried or grilled? (S)*

Although there were some participants who said it is expensive to buy healthy food, there were just as many who said eating fast food is expensive. A more complete summary of the cost discussion is included in the next section of this report.

In addition to the many “logistical” reasons for not eating healthy, a few moms confessed to being lazy or simply not having the willpower. Even though they know it would be better to fix a healthy meal at home, they would rather *take the easy way out*, and pick up a burger and fries on their way home. And, for these moms, it *tastes better*.

Participant Comments:

*I also agree that people just take the easy way out because it's faster to just stop by somewhere real quick and take it home and eat real quick and then go lay down and watch TV.*

*Basically I think I get bored because I try and eat good because my husband is always working out at the gym and he is in shape, so he is always telling me to get some fruit and stuff and then it becomes a habit, but then it just gets boring eating like that. And then last night we went to go get a fruit parfait and the one place we went to only had one parfait left and there were two of us, so we ended up driving further to get two parfaits, but then I decided to get a hamburger and fries too. So it just gets boring.*

*I don't think that vegetables really taste that good, but they are good for you. If you don't know how to prepare them, then they won't have the same taste that fast food might have.*

*We don't have the will to do it. (S)*

*Our cravings beat us. (S)*

*You start eating healthy but get the urge for a soda or pizza; you can't leave it all. (S)*

Finally, a few participants suggested that it's just a matter of what you are used to. If your family has eaten fried foods or food that is high in fat “forever,” it's hard to break that habit.

Participant Comments:

*You're not used to it. The education in your house stays with you. (S)*

The issue of cost was discussed at some length. Eating healthy and eating junk and fast food were both said to be expensive, and both said to be more expensive than the other. Some women gave examples of how expensive it is to purchase fresh fruits and veggies, milk, fish, and other items at the grocery store, while others gave examples of how expensive it is to buy fast food for their families.

At the same time, these moms said grocery stores have specials all the time, and that there are some stores that will beat the price of any other advertised specials. Several said that if you shop smart, eating healthy foods is less expensive than junk or fast food. Others countered citing all of the fast food coupons that are available as well as the 99-cent or dollar menus most fast food restaurants now have.

Participant Comments:

### Healthy food

*It's not the access; it's just the amount it costs. Fruits and vegetables are so expensive right now. I go and look at the prices and I think, "Oh, no! I don't want to buy those apples because they're too expensive!" Milk is starting to get the same way, too.*

*I stay away from tomatoes (because of the cost) and I love tomatoes. It doesn't matter if you get the little ones or the big ones.*

*Especially fresh fruits and vegetables. The prices of them have gone up so much that I'm more apt to go buy a can of corn than fresh corn.*

*Yeah, but the fruits and vegetables at Food City have to be eaten the same day because the next day they are rotten.*

*You have to plan your meals because it could get extremely expensive if you don't plan it and pay attention.*

*I tried to cook one time when I was on a diet and it is expensive to eat the right foods and the right portions.*

*In my family there are six of us at home, so if I buy some fish, buying one pound isn't enough for my family. Normally when I cook I will get some fish nuggets for my kids to eat because, in order to feed all six people, I would have to buy at least five pounds of fish and sometimes it's \$2.99 a pound if you get it on special, and so that is*

*\$15.00 right there. Plus, you usually have a salad and juice or milk with it too.*

*The ideal diet is expensive. Fruit is not so cheap. Oranges are sold individually. If we buy, we do so in small quantities. It is expensive and spoils fast. (S)*

*One barrier is that sometimes one does not have money to buy (fruits and vegetables). (S)*

### *Junk/fast food*

*It's way more expensive to eat fast food.*

*On the fast food, mostly it's inexpensive because they give you the 99-cent menu.*

*Like the hamburgers. I don't make them at home because they have McDonald's right there. Two Big Mac's for \$3. It's easy to get some and bring them home.*

*I think it's expensive for one sitting. Yesterday I went to Sonic and it was \$27.00 just for lunch. I have a family of 5, it's my 4 kids and me, so I can spend less than \$10.00 if I was to go to the grocery store to buy stuff for lunch, but that was almost \$30.00 down the drain just like that. It hurts you because the next thing you know you don't have any money because you spent it at McDonald's and all those other places. I told my kids that we've got to cut down on eating fast food. They are always asking for Jack-In-The-Box because they are so hooked on it. They already know the combo number at each fast food place that they want. They get addicted to it.*

*I have a Burger King right across the street from where I live, so I was just going to go there for a Mocha Joe and then my kids decided to tag along and they like cini-minis and then I ordered some for me too. They are only \$1.00 because most fast food places have \$1.00 menus, so there are a lot of items that you can get for only \$1.00. So we got French toast sticks and then the rest was off the \$1.00 menu. My daughter wanted a Whopper Jr. off the dollar menu, so I got her one. It gives you the illusion that it's cheap, but it does add up and then the next thing you know you've spent \$12.00.*

*You go and spend \$20 and say "we ate really delicious," but those \$20 can go further at home. (S)*

#### 4. Unhealthy Eating: Advantages & Disadvantages

##### i. Advantages

Convenient, easy, and fast are the major advantages of fast food as well as grabbing a handful of chips or a soda for lunch. Participants gave many examples of eating this way when they didn't have the time or the energy to fix a meal. Others point to the fact that you don't have dishes to wash or messes to clean when you buy fast food for lunch or dinner. Some said their kids like fast food, so rather than argue with them, that's what they eat, with others that they, themselves prefer the taste, and still others that, because members of their family like different things, everyone can have what he or she wants if they go to a fast food restaurant. Finally, several women commented on the 99-cent or dollar menus available at fast food places, making this a viable alternative from a budget standpoint.

Participant Comments:

*I was going to school and I was working, and in the morning I was always running late to school, so I would stop somewhere and pick up something really quick, and then after school I would have to go to work, so I would have to grab something. By the time I got out of work, I was too tired to make dinner.*

*Like if you do have an appointment or something on your schedule that day, then it might fit into your schedule a little bit more than going home and fixing a meal that you have to prepare.*

*It's faster to do fast food because you've got something you can eat while you're driving.*

*If you've been doing something all day and you come home and you didn't think about fixing dinner that night, you pull a pizza out of the freezer and that way you don't have to wash dishes.*

*Have more time to spend with the family instead of in the kitchen all the time.*

*It tastes good when you are starving, and then when you are done eating it, you feel disgusted.*

*(Your kids will) be happy to go to McDonald's, so then you are happy because they are happy.*

*The best thing is you don't have to dirty your kitchen!*

*There's probably more of a variety (with fast food).*

*It saves you time because you don't have to cook a meal. When you are done eating it, you can just wrap it up and throw it away rather than having to wash dishes. It's especially nice when you just cleaned your house because you don't want to mess it up again.*

*It is convenient because you're out in the street and you don't want to get home and cook, so you buy a hamburger or a pizza and that is it, when you are tired. (S)*

## ii. Disadvantages

Getting sick is the biggest disadvantage of not eating healthy. This includes both short-term illnesses and conditions (e.g., makes you feel gross, don't have energy, causes you to have intestinal problems) and long-term illnesses and conditions (e.g., diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood sugar, high cholesterol, heart disease, cancer).

That said, many of these illnesses are perceived to happen to "older people," or are potential problems "down the road." For the majority, these are not immediate threats and are often not on their radar screen. Even though many have family members who have/had one or more of these conditions/diseases, few consider this motivation enough to change their behavior. As might be expected, older participants were more likely to have changed behavior because of a family member's experience with a disease.

### Participant Comments:

*You start to get all the other sicknesses (high blood pressure, high blood sugar, high cholesterol, heart attacks, cancer, obesity).*

*It's not very beneficial to your health, but it is good food that tastes good. I don't think there are any benefits though.*

*I don't know about anybody else, but I know when I tend to go with long periods of not eating as healthy as I should, I tend to get cranky and really irritable.*

*If you eat foods that are high in fat, you gain weight. That is definitely a factor right there. Most of those diseases have to do with weight, too. Diabetes, cholesterol, the heart.*

*I think if you're not eating healthy, then your immune system just doesn't work as well and you get sick more often.*

*Sometimes you aren't happy after you eat fast food. It's like having a fast food hangover.*

*And then you feel like a bad mom because you don't know what is going into your child's body.*

*It's expensive and it's greasy. You can't really control the calories. They have that information available to you on the menus, but you*

*don't really pay attention to how many calories you are eating. You don't know how much saturated fat you are eating.*

*You become hypertensive because of the high salt contents, and because of the high caloric value, you tend to be overweight, so if you gain weight around the middle then you become diabetic.*

*It stresses your intestines. (S)*

*Yes. One feels fatigued, tired, sometimes feeling like you don't want to do anything because you don't have energy. (S)*

*Sometimes one thinks that eating unhealthy doesn't have an effect, but with time you begin to notice the problems. (S)*

## 5. Family's Influence on Eating Habits

Many of these women are heavily influenced by the food preferences of their families. Women often cater to the likes and dislikes of their family members. These preferences not only affect what they prepare for their families, but it impacts their own diet as well. Participants gave examples of times when their husbands/boyfriends or children wanted to get a hamburger from McDonald's or other fast food restaurant, and even though they would have fixed something at home, they decided to go along with what the others wanted. Either they didn't want to fix something for themselves, or it was easier than arguing with others in the family.

Moms also say kids influence what they buy at the grocery store, but to varying degrees. Some participants explained that they purposely go grocery shopping when their children are in school because they don't want them grabbing chips, sodas, candy, sugary cereals, and other unhealthy food items. Others, who do take their kids with them, say their kids like to buy these foods, so moms will often let them have one or two of the items they choose.

A few moms say they get compliments on the meals they make using fresh ingredients as well as the prepared foods they take out of the freezer. However, asking for more and requesting specific meals another time are the main ways moms know what their families like. In contrast, when they don't like something, children are quick to complain. If mom has spent a long time preparing the meal, this can be frustrating and depressing to her.

### Participant Comments:

*My boyfriend only likes a few homemade meals, so if I decide to make chicken and vegetables for dinner, he will go out and get a hamburger, but then I tell him I don't want to eat the chicken and vegetables by myself, and then I will end up eating a hamburger with him. It's kind of hard.*

*I say my son influences a lot of the stuff that I buy from the grocery store. When it comes to fruits and vegetables, I stick with the ones I know that he'll eat.*

*I saw this apron that said, 'My secret ingredient is resentment', and I really related to it because when you cook something and your child says they're not really hungry, then it gets very frustrating.*

*I usually go shopping while they're at school. If they do go shopping with me, I'm pretty good about sticking to my list. Every once in a while they'll say, "Can I have that snack?" or something and I'll buy it for them. Sometimes I'll just tell them, "No."*

*Sad, it makes me sad (when my family complains) and I say "I want to make them something that they like, but I know that they have to eat this even if they don't like it; I have to make it for them." (S)*

*I don't make it for them anymore (if my kids didn't eat what I prepared.) I would feel bad. (S)*

*I think "I am going to start cooking right," so I start to cook one or two weeks right and everyone begins to complain, or that I start cooking something more delicious, and I start changing it and I end up cooking things with more fat. In reality I am concerned, but I let myself be influenced by the rest and I begin not to cook healthy. (S)*

*If you go to the supermarket with the children, they influence you into buying things that are not healthy like cookies and candies. (S)*

## C. PERCEIVED THREAT OR Risk of A CONDITION/DISEASE

### 1. Family History

Many focus group participants have/had family members with one or more of the diseases they mentioned when they discussed the benefits of eating healthy as well as the risks associated with unhealthy eating habits. High cholesterol, high blood pressure, high blood sugar, obesity, heart disease, cancer and diabetes were all mentioned. A few had lost family members to these diseases and others have family members who are currently living with these conditions and diseases.

Overwhelmingly, these women consider diabetes a very serious disease, with several saying you can die from it, and others giving examples of friends or family members who had had a leg amputated because of diabetes. Heart disease and obesity are also thought to be very serious, with many agreeing that obesity can lead to other problems, including heart disease.

Cancer was mentioned less frequently, with some associating it directly with smoking, and others saying you have less control over whether or not you get this disease.

Group members were fairly evenly divided on whether or not having a family member with one of these diseases necessarily meant they were at a higher risk of getting the disease. A few said the fact that someone in their family had a particular disease had already caused them to modify their eating habits, while others didn't think there was a connection at all. Others believe that having a family member of the same sex with a specific disease was riskier than a member of the opposite sex with that disease. For example, for these women, if a mother, grandmother, aunt, or sister has or had a specific disease, they feel they are more at risk than if a father or grandfather has it.

Some of the women who have a family member who has a disease and who think they are at higher risk don't think they need to do anything yet. However, *as they get older* they will probably need to start eating better.

Participant Comments:

*My sister just started getting high cholesterol. (Moderator: Do you know what is contributing to that?) It's the fast food eating. She also eats a lot of junk food like candy and soda and stuff like that. Now they are cutting her back on a nonfat diet because of that.*

(Moderator: So do you think that increases your risk at all?) No. I know that I need to stop what I'm doing already, so it might increase it because it might run in our family, but as far as it happening to me, I don't think I would ever let it get that far.

Well, my grandpa died of heart disease and diabetes. On the female side we can eat anything and not get any of that!

My mother eats horrible and she's fine.

I can drink a 12-pack of soda in a matter of half a day by myself. I'm the only one doing it and it's not good. The doctors keep telling me if I keep up this way I can cause my kidneys to fail or I could cause myself to get diabetes. It's not something I want.

My mom has diabetes. (Moderator: Do you feel like you are at a higher risk because of that?) No. I should start watching what I eat more now that I'm getting older, so I guess maybe a little bit.

I was a lot heavier than I am now, but I lost a lot of weight. My family doesn't take care of themselves. They love to eat junk food and they don't really watch their sugar and all that, so I thought I had better start watching my diet and take care of myself before I ended up like them.

I know that we're supposed to eat healthier, but I guess we never did. I see a lot of people who are sick, like in my family, and I know that I have to do something if I want to be healthier. I changed my eating habits and the amount of food that I eat because I used to eat a lot of food.

When she died, the doctor said, "You'd better go and get checked for diabetes." One of us could get it, my brother or sister or me. That's why I like to do more exercising.

Yeah, I think I have a higher risk, but I also know that I can prevent some of those things, so I can lower my risks by eating healthy.

Maybe I might be prone to them, but then I develop a healthy diet and then I might lower my chances of getting one of those things. My dad and mom both have diabetes and I heard that I will get it no matter what because they both have it, but I don't think that is necessarily true if I was to prevent it now. I'm in my 30's, but if I was

*to go on my ideal eating plan, then it would help prevent it. I think I can break that chain.*

*They have always told us to be careful with diseases because my grandmother died from diabetes. (S)*

*My mother has high blood pressure and we used to eat lots of fried food, but now we have to eat better because of her and everyone has felt better. (S)*

## **D. Family Meals**

Many group members say they sit down as a family to have dinner – or in the case of many Hispanic families, lunch - several times a week. And, the majority says the TV is off. They consider this a great time to catch up with family members, hear stories about their kids' school day, and “make memories.” The most frequently mentioned reason for not sitting down as a family was mom or dad's work schedule.

In addition to sharing family stories – both past and present – moms list a number of benefits to family meals. Monitoring what their children eat, not eating as fast, helping kids with problems they are having at school, and being calmer and more enjoyable are among those cited.

Participant Comments:

### Frequency of Family Meals

*We do almost every day.*

*I would say we eat together three or four times a week.*

*Probably five or six times a week.*

*We eat together about twice a week.*

*Three or four nights because sometimes my husband arrives late from work and he is having dinner at 6:00 in the evening. (S)*

*We are together during lunch – three or four times a week. (S)*

*Not dinner because he will get home late . . . he will get home at 4:00 or 5:00. (S)*

### Benefits of Family Meals

*When you have (your family) around, they're not eating as fast as if you are by yourself because you have a little bit more conversation. It's better for your digestive system to eat slower than faster, so that helps.*

*You get to talk with your kids and see how their day went at school.*

*It's also really the only time the whole family just connects together as a family.*

*We are happy, and we should cherish these moments together. It makes memories.*

*It just feels calmer and more organized when we're all sitting and everybody is connected.*

*You are making sure that everybody eats and you are sharing time together to catch up on things. You are watching what your kids are eating. It's just basically a moment where you can relax and enjoy yourself and your family time.*

*You talk about their day at school or at work. You bond more as a family. (S)*

*You see what they eat and the quantity each one eats. (S)*

Different schedules (work and otherwise) and liking and eating different things were also mentioned as barriers to eating together as a family.

#### Participant Comments:

*You overeat because you get too happy and too comfortable.*

*Whenever my kids leave the table and don't finish their food I will end up eating their leftovers, so I end up eating double because I will eat my food plus whatever they left.*

*We sit down as a family three to four nights, because sometimes my husband arrives late from work and he is having dinner at 6:00 in the evening. (S)*

*We don't have dinner because he will get home late. He will get home at 4:00 or 5:00. (S)*

*I think that when you eat more as a family is when you have more junk food because my children don't like vegetables and fruit and they don't want it. I struggle so that they can get to the table so we can all eat together, but when there is pizza, everyone is together at the table. (S)*

## E. Self-Efficacy

Participants were asked to consider the topics discussed in the groups and to say whether or not that had adopted any of these healthy eating behaviors in the past few months.

Several women report having changed their diets in the past six months and have a variety of reasons for doing so. A few mentioned they had family members with a particular disease, so felt they needed to change before they ended up like the family member. Obesity and diabetes were mentioned most frequently in these examples, although there were also mentions of high blood pressure, high blood sugar, and high cholesterol. There were also several women who said they eat healthy for a while, and then something happens in their lives that causes them to fall back on old habits.

Participant Comments:

*I changed for my daughter. I eat a lot of vegetables but my daughter was gaining a lot of weight because she was getting a lot of fast food with that so I just quit that.*

*I started it and then I fell back and stopped it, but then I caught myself and realized I needed to eat more salad and stuff like that, so I went back to doing it.*

*I go back and forth, but I don't think I really am at risk because I try and eat well, which I do for the most part, and then I will backslide.*

*You try the majority of the time to eat healthy, but you always vary on the weekends. (S)*

*I have because we were going to the nutritionist because he wasn't feeling too good, so we were going to change his diet and everything. We were following it for several months but then he got tired of it and started "I want this" only twice a week and now we are back to the same, less healthy than before, because it used to be vegetables with no fat but now the fat has returned. (S)*

*Me, ever since my husband came out with cholesterol in the blood and now I changed again because it is healthier. (S)*

*During the week I prepare salads and soup and on the weekends, pizza. (S)*

Most participants feel they can eat more fruits and vegetables (particularly, fruits), but fewer feel as confident about switching from whole or 2% milk to 1% low fat or fat free milk. The difference -- most like fruits and vegetables, but don't like the taste of 1% low fat milk. They also seem to see the important role fruits and vegetables play in a healthy diet, but don't see that as clearly with low fat milk. (1% low fat and fat free milk were mentioned less frequently when participants were asked to identify foods that should be included in a healthy diet.) And, perhaps because these moms have younger kids (at least one is between two and 11), they tend to sit down with their families for dinner regularly and are confident this can continue (at least until their kids get older).

#### Participant Comments:

*Whole milk is more expensive than 1%. I prefer the fattier stuff; I really do. Drinking one percent milk you might as well be drinking water with the way it tastes.*

*What keeps us from drinking it is precisely the taste. (S)*

*One time I read in the Internet that 2% is the one that has the most calcium and that is why I drink it. (S)*

*I think we have to set our mind and then keep it set. It's like lack of organizing your day and planning. You have to set your mind that you are going to eat healthy or you're going to eat this or that and then you're going to keep it set and maintain that and try to achieve it throughout the day. If you just get up and you don't really care and you don't know what's next, then that's when you tend to do all those wrong things because you started off wrong and you keep doing that throughout your day.*

*Yes, and sticking with your own decision. Like if you make a promise to eat healthy throughout the day, you have to abide by that promise. You have to respect that word that you put out for your own self for your own integrity and your own loyalty to your own word. I don't think we are doing that though. We just need to plan ahead.*

*I think we tend to blame things and circumstances, like maybe I just got out of a bad relationship and I was overeating because I was depressed because my boyfriend cheated on me or things like that, so you kind of justify your eating because this or that is happening to you. And then you are the person who keeps saying I'll start*

doing it tomorrow, so we become tomorrow people today. I think it's just a matter of awareness. Like what we did right now, you have to put it down on paper and see really how you messed up throughout the day and you have to feel bad for doing it. Sometimes you just do it and you don't realize that you did it, but when you see it on paper then it becomes real and you see that you ate 4,000 calories in one day. So when you take the time and you write it down then it gives you an idea of what you did. When I was writing this then I realized I need to drink more water, so it was a matter of me looking at it. I can assure you that I'm going to start a better diet tomorrow because this is staring at me in the face. I've heard of people that are overweight and they didn't realize how fat they really were until they saw a picture of themselves and then they start crying. I think this is the same type of thing.

I think I have gotten worse over the last six months. I can assure you that after today it's going to be different. It's always in the back of your mind. I think when people mess up there's always this little voice there telling you that you are messing up. You kind of put that to the side and you indulge and then you feel guilty and you have no energy. Whenever I overeat I have no energy throughout the day and I feel nasty, so that's when you promise yourself that you are going to cut down on your portions. Overeating makes you lazy. You expand and you swell and you don't want to do anything. If you start off overeating in the morning, then forget the rest of your day because you won't have energy.