

Why is dietary diversity Important?

Dietary diversity is typically used to determine or evaluate the diet quality of individuals and households. At other times, it is used as a proxy for expected nutritional outcomes. Because malnutrition has been a persistent problem in Benue, it is important for households to know some simple and cost-effective methods to achieve good dietary diversity. Poor dietary diversity (when people do not eat enough different kinds of food) is a cause of nutritional deficiencies when people do not get enough macro and micronutrients from their food. These nutritional deficiencies are responsible for impaired physical and mental development, susceptibility to various diseases, premature deaths in children, poor pregnancy outcomes for women and lower adult work productivity.



Source: www.researchgate.com

Wrong conception of malnutrition

Malnutrition (both under nutrition and obesity) affects urban and rural residents because some apparently rich urban residents have the wrong conception of what a diverse diet should be. A diverse diet goes beyond eating expensive foods, all in the same food category. Rather, it is eating foods containing all the categories needed to make a diverse diet. Education is one of the important ways documented by researchers to improve dietary diversity. Nutritional education is important because the knowledge of what makes up a healthy diet is as important as having the income base to purchase foods.



Source: <http://bit.ly/2VHvno7>

How is the dietary diversity score calculated?

The diversity score is a measure used internationally to measure dietary diversity. It measures how many food groups are found in the foods a household eats. The 12 food groups based on FAO's recommendation are: (1) cereals, (2) vegetables, (3) fruits, (4) meat, (5) egg (6) fish and other sea products, (7) legumes, nuts and seeds (8) milk and milk products (9) oil and fats (10) sweets, (11) spices, condiments and beverage (12) tubers and roots. For example, a household that consumed only cereals, fruits and vegetables gets a score of three, while a household that consumes food from all twelve food groups gets a score of twelve.

Irrespective of what kind of foods we eat, we must all strive to make sure it is a mix of all the 12 food groups. Each food group supplies unique micronutrients (nutrients such as vitamins and minerals which are needed in small amounts but very important for proper growth and bodily function) to the body. Thus it is not just about eating macronutrients such as protein or carbohydrate, but also about making sure that the foods we eat also provide these micronutrients too. For example, meats, eggs and milk are all proteins, but they also supply different micronutrients and both of these different nutrient types are critical for healthy living.

Is dietary diversity achievable by an average household?

Good news! The knowledge of a combination of simple, local inexpensive foods for a diverse daily diet in a typical Benue household is available. Even with little money you can have the right combination of every food group and be fine.

What is an inexpensive but diverse diet for a day in Nigeria, particularly Benue State where yams and fruits are plentiful and cheap?

Breakfast- Bread or pap (cereal), tea (milk and milk products) and Eggs (50 naira for an egg)

Lunch- pounded yam or “akpu” (roots and tubers), Egusi made with crayfish, pork or meat or fish(protein), salt, palm oil, “ugwu” and locust beans (legumes, nuts and seed, sea foods, meat, spices, oil and vegetables) and water.

Dinner- Jollof rice (cereals) with local “zobo” drink (sugar) and some oranges (fruits) to go down.

From this example of the food eaten by a typical Benue household, we see that the major food groups can be adequately covered in a day. In addition, vitamins and minerals needed for energy production, immune function, blood clotting and other functions are also provided in a typical day’s food. Dietary diversity is not an impossible goal, with the right knowledge of combination of foods needed to cover the 12 food groups. It is an achievable goal even for families that are not financially buoyant. Every family should therefore strive to achieve this goal because the financial and economic loss associated with malnutrition in terms of sickness, low productivity and performance in school outweighs the cost attached to acquiring a diverse diet, in the long run. Malnourished people have low self-esteem in addition to low cognitive performance which lead to low future economic returns.

Whenever you hear people say a diverse diet is only in the reach of the rich, give them nutritional education by explaining the relevance and roles of the 12 food groups. The poor can also enjoy a diverse diet!



Source: <http://bit.ly/2PTtP56>

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Dietary Diversity isn’t far fetched

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Source: <http://bit.ly/2H6ELJx>

What is dietary diversity?

Dietary diversity is a qualitative measure of food consumption that reflects household access to different kinds of foods. It is also a proxy for nutrient adequacy of the diet of individuals.