

WIC

Answers to Commonly Asked Questions

Listed below are commonly asked questions by WIC participants and persons interested in the program. We hope these questions and answers help you during the process.

(General Information)

1. Where is WIC available?

The program is available in all 50 States, 33 Indian Tribal Organizations, America Samoa, District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. These 88 WIC State agencies administer the program through 2,200 local agencies and 9,000 clinic sites.

2. How many people does WIC serve?

More than 7.5 million people get WIC benefits each month. In 1974, the first year WIC was permanently authorized, 88,000 people participated. By 1980, participation was at 1.9 million; by 1985 it was 3.1 million; and by 1990 it was 4.5 million. Average monthly participation for Fiscal Year (FY) 2003 was approximately 7.63 million.

Children have always been the largest category of WIC participants. Of the 7.63 million people who received WIC benefits each month in FY 2003, approximately 3.82 million were children, 1.95 million were infants, and 1.86 million were women.

3. What does WIC provide?

- Health screening (checking height, weight and iron level)
- Free nutritious foods
- Information on healthy eating
- Breastfeeding support
- Referrals

4. How effective is WIC?

- WIC has proven to:
- Reduce fetal deaths and infant mortality.
- Reduce the incidence of low birth weight.
- Improve children's diets.
- Improve the growth of at risk infants and children.
- Give kids the nutrition they need to do better in school.
- WIC kids are more likely to have regular medical care and are better immunized.
- Improve healthy weight gain for pregnant women.
- WIC moms receive prenatal care earlier.

5. Who is eligible for WIC?

- Pregnant women
- Women who are breastfeeding an infant younger than 12 months of age.
- Women who are less than 6 months postpartum and not breastfeeding.
- Infants or children younger than 5 years of age.

Check our income guidelines or call us to see if you might qualify at 518-565-4830.

WIC will verify your income and other criteria to make sure you qualify at your application appointment.

6. What does WIC certification and recertification mean?

When you first apply for WIC, we have to verify that you meet all the eligibility requirements. We call this certification. When you re-apply for WIC because your certification period has ended (usually a six month period), we must again verify that you continue to meet all the eligibility requirements. We call this a recertification. Certification and recertifications are basically the process we do to complete your paperwork, to determine if you are eligible to receive WIC and to put you on the WIC Program.

7. Does my income meet WIC guidelines?

- WIC includes the following in calculating your family's income:
- Wages/salary for all persons in your household
- Child support/alimony (you can not deduct child support paid out)
- Income from self-employment or part-time work (ex. Daycare, paper routes)
- Social Security, Public Assistance, Unemployment
- Bonuses

Income is calculated for the previous month. See income guidelines to find the limit for a family your size. If you are paid every other week, use the "bi-weekly" column. If you are paid twice a month (say, on the 5th and the 20th), use the "twice monthly" column. If your income exceeds them even by a few dollars, you will not qualify for WIC. However, call the clinic if you have questions so we can help you calculate it correctly, especially if you have multiple sources of income.

8. I do not have any income. Can I apply if I don't have any documentation?

Yes. Bring what you do have to the WIC office. Your WIC staff will review your income with you.

9. If I live with my baby's father but we are not married, can I still receive WIC?

Yes, income is based on the family household regardless of relation. The same is true if you are a teen living with a parent. We look at the economic unit, who is supporting the person applying for WIC.

10. I am married. Can I still get WIC even if I am not single?

Yes, you can, if you meet the income guidelines and have a nutritional risk.

11. What about fathers?

Fathers of children under age five are encouraged to enroll their children in the WIC program. Just like any other parent or guardian, fathers can bring their children to appointments, attend nutrition education classes, and redeem food vouchers for their children. Active participation by fathers is a great help in keeping WIC children healthy.

12. What if I'm a foster parent?

You can apply on behalf of your foster child if he or she is under five years of age. Income is based on the amount of income you receive for the foster child. He or she counts as a family of one in those cases where the Welfare agency is legally responsible for the child. You must furnish a copy of the Foster Agreement at the time of enrollment and subsequent certification.

13. What if I'm a teen? Do I qualify if I live with my Mom or Dad?

In most cases, if you are a teen, you must count all of the income (including your parents) of your household when determining if you are eligible for WIC. Please call your local WIC office to find out if you are income eligible.

14. What if I am a grandparent?

If you are a grandparent who has custody of grandchildren under age 5, you may apply on their behalf. If you do not have custody, you may accompany your grandchildren and their parent to the WIC appointment and you may become a proxy. A proxy is a person who acts on behalf of the WIC parent/caretaker to come to WIC to pick up vouchers and/or to go to the food store to redeem them.

15. I am not a US citizen. Can I receive WIC?

Yes. Foreign citizens may receive WIC provided they meet the income and eligibility guidelines. A 'public charge' is a term used by Immigration to describe those who cannot support themselves and need public assistance. Receiving WIC benefits does not classify you as a 'public charge' or affect your application for immigration or citizenship.

16. I share custody with the child's other birth parent. Can we receive WIC?

Yes. When parents have joint custody and separate households, either parent may apply for their child if they have custody of the child at least 50 percent of the time. The other parent may not apply for WIC at the same time. The WIC benefits will be provided through the parent who made the application. It is the responsibility of the parents to share the child's WIC foods.

17. I belong to the Military. Can I receive WIC?

Yes, WIC checks can be used at military commissaries.

18. My baby just turned one year old. Can he/she still get WIC?

Yes, it is a misconception that infants can't get WIC once they turn a year old! They may continue to re-apply until they are five years old.

19. It is true that mothers can only apply for their infant but not for themselves?

No, that is not true. Mothers can apply for themselves if they are pregnant, postpartum or breastfeeding even if they have infants or children on WIC.

20. I am breastfeeding my baby and I don't need formula. Can I still receive WIC?

Yes, WIC supports breastfeeding. In fact, breastfeeding women can stay on the program for six months longer than a non-breastfeeding woman and they receive additional milk, juice, beans, and canned tuna.

21. I am breastfeeding, but my baby still needs supplemental formula. Can I get it and still be on WIC too?

Yes. WIC can issue checks for your baby to get some formula, and you can still get checks for WIC foods.

If you give your baby formula before your breast milk supply is fully established, you may reduce the amount of breast milk your body produces.

22. I heard you have breast pumps. Can you give me one?

Yes, some of the WIC offices have a limited number of hand and electric pumps available for loan. Talk to your WIC staff about your breastfeeding concerns. If together you feel a pump would be helpful they will discuss with you availability at their office. The number of available pumps is limited and they must be distributed to the highest risk infants first.

23. I miscarried my baby. Do I still qualify for WIC?

Mothers who miscarry their babies can still qualify for WIC as postpartum for 6 months from the day of the miscarriage. If this happens to you, call the clinic and explain your situation and they will make an appointment for you to come in and recertify.

24. How do I get the food? When do I get them?

Food vouchers are issued for each eligible participant. A family with more than one family member participating in WIC will have more than one set of food vouchers.

Both fathers and mothers can receive and spend the vouchers for their children.

These vouchers are taken to a participating WIC grocery store and are made out for specific WIC foods. WIC checks are good upon day of enrollment and will be dated each month thereafter as the enrollment date.

25. When can I start to use my WIC vouchers?

After completing the necessary requirements at the WIC certification visit you will leave with WIC vouchers. If you qualify for WIC, you can begin using the vouchers that day. The date listed on the voucher as "Not Good Before" is the date the vouchers can be redeemed through the "Not Good After" on the voucher. Be sure to check these dates before using any vouchers.

26. What food benefits do WIC participants receive?

In most WIC State agencies, WIC participants receive checks or food instruments to purchase specific foods each month which are designed to supplement their diets.

WIC food is high in one or more of the following nutrients: protein, calcium, iron, and vitamins A and C. These are the nutrients frequently lacking in the diets of the program's low-income target population. Different food packages are provided for different categories of participants. A few WIC State agencies distribute WIC foods through warehouses or deliver WIC foods to participants.

WIC foods include iron-fortified infant formula and infant cereal, iron-fortified adult cereal, vitamin C-rich fruit and/or vegetable juice, eggs, milk, cheese, peanut butter, whole grains, dried beans or peas, tuna fish. Special infant formulas and certain medical foods may be provided when prescribed by a physician or health professional for a specified medical condition.

27. Should I ask WIC for powdered or concentrated infant formula?

If you ask for powdered formula, WIC can give you a little more each month than if you ask for concentrated formula. And because the price is lower, you can save when you buy powdered infant formula to supplement what you get from WIC.

28. My baby needs special formula. Can you give me the brand I need?

WIC provides most formulas if your baby needs a different kind of formula talk to your WIC staff. We can provide some special formulas, but only if there is a documented health or nutritional need. Your doctor will need to complete and sign a WIC Medical documentation form. All WIC forms can be found on the county web site.

29. What should I do with formula that my baby does not need?

Return any unused infant formula to your local WIC office. Do not take it back to the store, or give it to someone else.

30. What do I need to do if my baby's formula gets changed?

Contact your local WIC agency. They will tell you if you need to have a prescription from the doctor for the new formula. Any unused formula and WIC checks will need to be brought back to the WIC office before the staff can give you checks for the new formula.

31. My baby needs more formula than I get from WIC each month. What can I do?

WIC is a supplemental nutrition program, and the amount of formula and other WIC foods you get each month is limited. You will need to buy additional formula. If this is a problem, tell the WIC staff. They may be able to refer you to a Food Bank or other source for more formula. If your baby is on a special medical formula, Medicaid may be able to pay for some.

32. Why doesn't WIC provide other formulas like Carnation? It is cheaper.

WIC has a contract to provide certain approved formulas, which saves a lot of money. The formula company gives us larger rebates on these formulas. This rebate money makes it possible for many more infants to be on the WIC program. Non-contract formulas like Carnation and Enfamil cost programs like the California WIC Program five to six times more than our contract formulas. It is important to note that infant formulas are carefully formulated to be safe and nutritionally appropriate for infants no matter what the brand.

33. What is the WIC infant formula rebate system?

Mothers participating in WIC are encouraged to breastfeed their infants if possible, but WIC State agencies provide infant formula for mothers who choose to use this feeding method. WIC State agencies are required by law to have competitively bid infant formula rebate contracts with infant formula manufacturers. This means WIC State agencies agree to provide one brand of infant formula and in return the manufacturer gives the State agency a rebate for each can of infant formula purchased by WIC participants. The brand of infant formula provided by WIC varies from State agency to State agency depending on which company has the rebate contract in a particular State.

By negotiating rebates with formula manufacturers, states are able to serve more people. For FY 2003, rebate savings were \$1.52 billion, supporting an average of 1.9 million participants each month, or 25 percent of the estimated average monthly caseload.

34. What should I do if the amount of any of the foods on my checks is too much for me or my child to eat each month?

Talk to your WIC counselor. The amount of food on your checks may be changed to fit your needs.

35. Does it matter where I spend my WIC checks?

Many stores in every area accept WIC checks. These stores must carry WIC approved foods. The following stores in our area accept WIC:

Rite-Aid	Skyway Shopping Center, Plattsburgh
Hannaford	Plattsburgh
Price Chopper	Plattsburgh
Price Chopper	Champlain
Southside Grocery	Plattsburgh
Wal-Mart	Plattsburgh
Yando's Big	M Skyway Shopping Center, Plattsburgh
Beekmantown Grocery	Beekmantown
Bill's Mini-Mart	Morrisonville
Cindy's Country Store	Mooers Forks
D&D Meats	Sciota
LaBarre's Store	Ellenburg
Grand Union Markets	Peru

36. Can both myself and my partner use my WIC?

When you apply for WIC you will be asked if you want to allow a second person besides yourself to be listed on your WIC file. This is called a proxy. This person would be able to pick your WIC checks up for you and also use them at the store.

37. If I am sick, can my proxy take my vouchers to the store and use them?

A proxy is someone who can use your vouchers when you are unable as long as they have signed the voucher also at the clinic. If you have the voucher at home and are sick, call the WIC clinic to make an appointment for the proxy to come in and have your vouchers reissued so they can then sign them in the clinic then take them to the store and make your WIC purchases.

NUTRITION

38. What is a health or nutrition risk?

WIC will measure you or your child's height and weight and also take hemoglobin (finger stick to check the iron levels in the blood). WIC will also talk to you about your or your child's health and eating concerns to see if you have a health or nutrition risk such as being underweight, overweight or not eating enough fruits and vegetables.

39. Why should I take prenatal supplements?

Prenatal vitamins are important before conception and during the first trimester for folic acid. Folic acid is important in the formation of your baby's spinal cord and brain, along with other organs. During the second and third trimester, they provide iron for your increased needs, along with other nutrients to help ensure a healthy pregnancy. They cannot take the place of a healthy diet.

40. I am a pregnant teenager. Do I need to eat differently than other pregnant women?

Pregnant teens are still growing and maturing, in addition to supporting a baby. You need to gain more weight than an adult woman during your pregnancy. You should follow the Food Guide Pyramid. Just increase the milk, cheese and yogurt group 4 servings per day. Choose a variety of foods from each of the food groups.

41. Why does WIC need to weigh and measure my child?

Your child's height and weight tell us a lot about her/his health. WIC weighs and measures a child regularly. How your child grows over time can identify a concern before it becomes a problem.

42. How often does WIC do blood work (hemoglobin) on children?

The WIC Nutrition Program follows the CDC guidelines for periodicity of blood work. Infants 9 months of age or older are required to have a hematological test for anemia between 9 and 12 months of age. Children over 1 year of age have a hematological test for anemia between 15-18 months, and annually thereafter if the results are within normal range. If the hemoglobin results are low, the test is done every 6 months until a test with normal range is obtained.

NOTE: Every effort is made to obtain hemoglobin values from the physician. If this is not possible, trained WIC staff will obtain the blood sample.

43. Why do you check iron?

Iron is found in the blood. It is important because it carries oxygen to all your inner organs so they can function properly.

44. What is anemia?

Anemia results when there is not enough iron in the blood to carry oxygen to all parts of the body. Baby and toddlers, pregnant and menstruating women, and people who have lost blood need more iron.

45. What foods are high in iron?

The best sources of iron are red meats, whole grain or enriched breads and cereals, and green leafy vegetables like spinach, as well as dried fruits and prune juice. The body can better use iron if a source of vitamin C is eaten with it.

46. Is iron-fortified formula important for my baby?

Yes, iron is very important to your baby. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that infants receive iron daily to help build healthy red blood cells. Without enough iron, your baby may have any of these symptoms:

- Fussiness
- Slow Growth
- Infections
- Lack of Interest in Eating
- Paleness
- Sleepiness

47. What is the best nutrition for my baby?

Breast milk is the very best nutrition that you can offer your baby. It is recommended that infants be fed breast milk exclusively for at least six months. Solid foods can be introduced at six months. It is recommended to breastfeed through the first year of life.

48. What are the benefits of breast milk over formula?

Breast milk:

- helps fight infections
- delays allergies
- is easy for the baby to digest so the baby will have less diarrhea
- is always warm and ready
- has the right balance of vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients
- builds a special closeness between the mother and the baby
- helps the mother's body get back into shape after pregnancy

49. What are the signs of a good milk supply?

- your baby nurses every 1-3 hours
- your baby has 6 or more wet and 2-3 soiled diapers each day by 5 days old
- babies should regain birth weight by 2 weeks and gain 4-8 ounces per week

50. What are the benefits of breastfeeding?

- Breastfed infants have 3x fewer ear infections
- Breastfed infants have 5x fewer urinary tract infections
- Breastfed infants have 5x fewer serious illnesses
- Breastfed infants have 5x fewer allergies
- Breastfed infants have less constipation, diarrhea, spitting up, and colic
- Breastfed infants have better jaw and speech development
- For every 87 artificially fed infants that die of SIDS only 3 breastfed infants die of SIDS

51. When is the suitable time to introduce solid food?

Your baby will be ready for solid foods when he/she:

- is between 5-6 months old
- holds her/his head up
- can sit with support
- acts interested in foods you are eating
- doesn't push food out with her tongue as she/he tries to swallow
- leans forward for food when hungry and turns head away or leans back when full.

52. At what age should I begin weaning my baby from the bottle?

Babies should be drinking all liquids from a cup by their first birthday. Using a bottle after one year or taking a bottle to bed contributes to cavities.

53. When can my baby drink cow's milk?

When your child is 12-18 months old, he or she can have whole cow's milk. Whole milk should be used until the child is two years of age. WIC provides whole milk for children at one year.

54. What foods should my baby avoid in the first year?

Avoid foods that commonly cause allergies or choking. You should also avoid giving honey or foods that contain honey. It may contain bacteria that can be fatal to infants.

- Allergies: egg whites (yolks are OK after 9 months), cow's milk, orange juice
- Choking: grapes, hot dogs, nuts, raw carrots, raisins, peanut butter, hard candy, popcorn, seeds, tough meats
- Other allergy-causing foods: wheat, corn, fish, nuts, strawberries are also common allergens. Wait to introduce these foods until baby is eating a variety of foods.

55. What if my child doesn't want to eat?

It is normal for children to have large appetites at times and almost no appetite other times. After about 1 year to 18 months, children's growth slows down and so do their appetites.

- If your child just won't eat, leave the plate in front of her until mealtime is over.
- Remove the plate from the table when mealtime is over.
- Scolding or threatening your child won't help (this will just make them afraid).
- Try not to feed her until the next meal or snack time.
- At the next meal, skip the talk about her not eating.

Remember, you are responsible for what you give your child to eat and where and when it is given. Your child is responsible for how much and if he eats.

56. Do my children need fluoride supplements?

Fluoride helps dental development. During the first several years of life, a child's permanent teeth are forming. When a child has enough fluoride, the bone crystal of the teeth is tighter and can resist cavities better. Water in certain areas is not fluoridated, and a supplement may be needed. A prescription is needed for a fluoride supplement. Consult your pediatrician, dentist or registered dietitian before giving your children any supplementation.

57. Now that I have had my baby, how can I lose weight?

Keep breastfeeding!

Losing weight is never easy, but it is possible if you make needed lifestyle changes. Exercise at least 3-4 times per week for 40-45 minutes. It not only burns calories; it can also increase your metabolism so that you burn more calories all day long.

Exercise also helps control appetite.

Eat right. The Food Guide Pyramid provides the best information on how to eat for a healthy weight. Emphasize whole grains, fruits and vegetables to help with weight loss. Added sugars, fats and oils should be used in moderation. Stop eating when you are full.

WIC APPOINTMENTS

58. What do you need to bring to an appointment?

At your initial appointment you need to bring proof of identification of the infant or Child, proof of residency, proof of income, and the person the appointment is for. Some examples of proof of residency are, your lease if you are renting, an electric bill or pay stub with your address on it.

59. Do I have to pick up an application form before I can make an appointment?

No, there is no WIC application. Stop in or call the main WIC office, 133 Margaret St or call 5⁸-565-4830.

61. What will happen at my WIC appointment?

Your income will be reviewed. You or your child will have your height, weight and iron level taken. WIC staff will review these with you. They will also discuss your diet and any concerns you have.

62. Do I have to bring my children to the appointment?

Yes and no.

Yes. All children who will be applying for WIC benefits (infants and children under the age of 5 years) must come to the first application appointment and to the recertification appointments every 6 months. If your baby was extremely premature or is chronically ill and your doctor has instructed you not to bring them alternate arrangements can be made. Make staff aware of your concerns. For infants, the 6 mos. evaluation requires the infant be present. The WIC staff will tell you when you need to bring the infant/child.

63. How long will my appointment take?

- You need to plan on at least 1-1/2 hours in the clinic for WIC certification.
- Group appointments typically last 30 minutes. This includes the time to attend the class and receive your vouchers and next appointment.
- Make sure you bring all the required documentation.

Please arrive on time to help us serve you as quickly as possible.

64. How often do I have to come to the WIC office?

WIC can give you up to three months worth of WIC checks at a time. Sometimes you and the WIC staff may decide you should come more often, on a monthly basis, for extra assistance. For example, WIC can recheck your child's weight each month if you are concerned about it or to get extra help with breastfeeding.

65. What if I don't make it on time to my appointment?

If there is an emergency or scheduling problem with your appointment and you arrive late, still check in with the dietician or WIC receptionist and they will be able to see if we can serve you at that time or reschedule your appointment.

66. What if I can't make it to my appointment?

As soon as you know you will not be able to keep your appointment call the clinic and reschedule for a different day. This way we will be able to use your appointment for someone else and also make an additional appointment for you at your earliest convenience.

67. What should I do if I move to another town or state?

Contact your local WIC agency before you move. You may need to complete and sign a Verification of Certification Request form.