

Consumer Research for Development of Educational Messages for the MyPyramid Food Guidance System

Patricia Britten, PhD; Jackie Haven, MS, RD; Carole Davis, MS, RD

ABSTRACT

Objective: To assess consumer understanding and use of messages from the original Food Guide Pyramid and potential concepts for a revised Food Guidance System.

Design: Focus groups conducted in two phases, in 2002 and 2004.

Setting: Market research facilities in Baltimore, Chicago, and Houston.

Participants: Phase I, 178 participants in 18 groups: 6 of general adult consumers, 4 of adults over 60 years of age, 4 of food stamp recipients, and 4 of overweight adults. Phase II, 75 participants in 8 groups: 4 of younger adults and 4 of older adults.

Phenomenon of Interest: Understanding and use of original Pyramid symbol and messages and potential concepts for a revised food guidance system.

Analysis: Focus group sessions were audiotaped and transcribed. Content analysis summarized comments into meaningful themes.

Results: Key concepts of the original Pyramid were widely understood, but specific knowledge was limited and misunderstandings common, especially related to servings and food group placement. Detailed information about whole grains, types of fats, vegetable subgroups, and physical activity was lacking.

Conclusions and Implications: While consumers are aware of general concepts about healthy eating, they lack specific knowledge to help them implement recommendations. Educators can help by providing consumers with concrete examples and specific information.

Key Words: MyPyramid, dietary guidance, consumer research, qualitative research

(J Nutr Educ Behav. 2006;38:S108-S123)

INTRODUCTION

The original Food Guide Pyramid (Pyramid), released in 1992, became one of the most recognized, used, and influential food guides in history.^{1,2} Although the Pyramid was adopted by many nutrition education programs, and a large majority of American consumers were familiar with the graphic, there was concern that consumers were not implementing its advice.^{1,3} National food intake surveys documented that consumers were not selecting diets consistent with Pyramid recommendations.⁴ The Healthy Eating Index, which assesses compliance with the Dietary Guidelines

for Americans and incorporates measures of Pyramid food group consumption as 5 of its 10 subscales, indicated that most Americans were not following the Pyramid's guidance and that their diets needed improvement.^{5,6}

During the 1990s, a new body of science-based information about nutrition, health, diet, and consumption patterns was generated. These new findings and recommendations prompted the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP) to undertake a broad-based reassessment and revision of the original Pyramid.³ Researchers have detailed the technical research that was undertaken and that resulted in the revision of the Pyramid's food intake patterns in accompanying articles.^{7,8} In addition to revising the underlying food intake patterns, CNPP staff designed the reassessment of the Pyramid to explore how a new food guide could provide useful and actionable guidance to consumers that would encourage adoption of the new food intake patterns. Consumer research was identified as an integral part of the overall process for reassessing and revising the Pyramid, to explore how to create guidance that is more useful to consumers.³

USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, Alexandria, VA

Address for correspondence: Patricia Britten, PhD, USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 1034, Alexandria, VA 22302; Phone: (703) 305-7600; Fax: (703) 305-3300; E-mail: Patricia.Britten@cnpp.usda.gov.

All of the figures in this article have also been compiled into an online slideshow. See www.JNEB.org, under supplementary material for this article.

PUBLISHED BY ELSEVIER INC. ON BEHALF OF THE SOCIETY FOR NUTRITION EDUCATION

doi: 10.1016/j.jneb.2006.08.006

The 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*,⁹ which was under development at the same time that the Pyramid was being reassessed, provided the scientific basis for the nutrition guidance to be included in the new food guidance system. The process for developing the 2005 Dietary Guidelines began with appointment of a committee of health and nutrition experts, the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC), by the secretaries of the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Agriculture (USDA) in September 2003.^{10,11} The secretaries charged the DGAC to provide a scientific report of its recommendations for the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.¹²

As the DGAC began its deliberations, the research questions that they selected for study helped to identify topics that might call for potential new food guidance messages. CNPP staff used topics that were of interest to the DGAC to help identify areas in which consumer research might be needed to explore how consumers understood and could apply guidance on these topics as part of a new food guidance system. For example, the DGAC decided to examine the evidence for the impact of whole-grain consumption on health and the links between activity, diet, and health.¹² Because the original Pyramid included only limited information on whole grains and did not include guidance on physical activity, formative research was needed to explore how consumers would understand and react to various terminology and messages that might be incorporated into a new guidance system. Additional concerns considered in developing the consumer research topics included a number of issues that had been raised by nutrition and industry groups and were summarized by Nestle.² Also, authors have suggested that the way in which recommended food intake amounts were presented, as a number of servings of specified size, was subject to widespread misinterpretation by consumers.^{13,14}

This article presents the results of 2 phases of consumer research conducted as part of the overall process for reassessing and revising the Pyramid. The first phase of this research, conducted in 2002, was designed to explore consumer understanding and use of the original Pyramid.¹⁵ The main objective for this phase was to assess consumer understanding of messages from the original Pyramid, and the extent to which the graphic illustration of the Pyramid communicated these concepts and messages. The second phase of the research, which began in 2004, built on the findings from the first phase.¹⁶ Its major objective was to assess how consumers perceived and understood potential concepts and messages for a new food guidance system.

METHODS

Study Design

Focus group interviews (focus groups) were used to obtain insight into consumers' understanding, opinions, and beliefs regarding the topics of interest. Focus groups constitute a qualitative research method widely used in nutrition

education research.¹⁷ As noted by Kreuger, focus groups "provide an environment in which disclosures are encouraged and nurtured. . . through open-ended questions within a permissive environment."¹⁸ [p. 15] The discussion format of focus groups allows respondents to discuss their understandings and feelings about specific topics in depth and to react to or build on the opinions of other participants. We were especially interested in identifying potential terminology that was understandable and messages that were considered actionable as part of the development process for revising the Pyramid. In addition, the group discussion format can provide insights into alternative ways of expressing educational messages that may be better understood by consumers.

The study included 2 phases of consumer research, with a total of 26 focus groups. Phase I included 18 groups of 8 to 12 participants each, in May and June 2002. Phase II consisted of 8 focus groups of 8 to 11 participants each, in February and March 2004. All focus groups were approximately 2 hours long and were audiotaped. The research was conducted under contract for USDA by Systems Assessment and Research, Inc., (Phase I) and Annapolis Professional Resources, Inc. (Phase II). Both contractors used the services of market research firms in each focus group location for their facilities and participant recruitment capabilities.

Moderator guides were prepared by the contractor, using descriptions of topics provided by USDA and following discussion with USDA of the intended purpose for the groups and types of information being sought. The guides were reviewed by USDA and revised by the contractors as needed. The topics for the Phase I and Phase II groups, which served as the basis for development of the moderator guides, are outlined in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively. Sample questions and probes from the guides are also presented in Tables 1 and 2. All research materials, including participant screeners and moderator guides, were approved by the Federal Office of Management and Budget for compliance with regulations based on the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in a group session.

Professional moderators conducted the focus groups using these moderator guides to direct discussion around topics of interest. Moderators with extensive experience in moderating focus groups were selected by the contractors with review and approval by USDA. They all possessed formal training and experience as skilled neutrals, which enabled them to appropriately solicit relevant information from focus group participants without offering their personal opinions or ideas. Phase I focus groups were led by 1 of 2 moderators. The 2 moderators attended training and role-playing sessions to pre-test the guide with contract staff, and they discussed possible issues with contract and USDA staff to establish common meanings and come to agreement on the approach. One moderator also observed the first focus group led by the other moderator, to ensure

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/363365>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/363365>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)