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Food Insecurity and Dietary Restrictions

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Food Insecurity and Dietary Restrictions

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Background

Across the nation, more than 50 million Americans rely on food banks in order to provide for themselves and their families [1]. Of those 50 million Americans, a great percentage of them have dietary restrictions that are oftentimes not met. Some examples of dietary restrictions include [2]:

- Food Allergies
- Lactose Intolerance
- Gluten Intolerance
- Diabetes

Objective

Our aim was to identify the needs of those struggling with food insecurity with respect to their dietary restrictions using current available information from both primary sources, such as scholarly articles, and secondary sources, such as online newspaper articles.

Methods

- Google and PubMed Database search for data relating to health outcome statistics and availability using the following operators: “food insecurity” and “diabetes”, “food allergies”, and “special diets”
- News article search for local and countrywide stories about the struggle of food accessibility and food pantry resources News article search on what different areas have done to help the issue of food accessibility in relation to diet restrictions

Results

- A 2016 study found that families with children with special needs were more likely to report household food insecurity, but that households with special needs that received SSI reported lower child food insecurity [3]
- A 2022 study showed that 21% of families with food allergies are food insecure with limited access to allergen free food at food pantries [4]
- A pilot study at a food pantry with a diabetes management program showed a decrease in Hba1C levels [5]
- Massachusetts, North Carolina, New York and California all have programs to help pay for medically tailored meals [6]

Conclusion

There is an issue with food accessibility for people with dietary restrictions, but there are many further systemic issues in regards to access to allergen-free, gluten-free, dairy-free, low-sodium, and/or low-sugar foods.

Meaningful interventions would involve connecting with community stakeholders, such as local food banks and qualified nutritionists, in order to provide resources to community members who may not completely understand their dietary options. These resources could include locations to access affordable, diverse food options, as well as information regarding how to read nutrition labels.

Image 1 shows the international symbol for Gluten-Free Products [7]



Limitations

Primary limitation was the lack of articles on food insecurity with respect to dietary needs, particularly articles on how this issue impacts New Jersey residents.

References

