

“What Can I Eat?” Healthy Choices for American Indian and Alaska Native Adults with Type 2 Diabetes

The goal of this study was to help American Indian adults living with diabetes eat healthier and improve their overall health. Eating healthy foods can help lower blood sugar, blood pressure, and weight.

Why It Matters

Healthy eating helps manage blood sugar, blood pressure, cholesterol, and weight, which is important for people living with diabetes. It can be hard to eat well when time, money, or stress get in the way.

Learning about healthy eating in a group can make it easier, because people living with diabetes can share ideas and support each other. Food is an important part of Tribal culture. Including traditional foods and practices can help American Indian adults eat healthier.

What Did We Do?

In this study, we wanted to learn the best way to help people eat healthier. We tested whether diabetes nutrition classes, a food security resource, or both worked the best. Sixty-seven American Indian adults living with type 2 diabetes took part in the study.

Each diabetes nutrition education class included:

- Information about healthy eating;
- An exercise activity;
- An activity focused on making mindful decisions about food; and
- Peer to peer sharing and learning.

Classes covered topics such as:

- Identifying carbohydrate and protein foods;
- Incorporating healthy traditional foods;
- Reading food labels to identify salty foods;
- Choosing healthy and non-sugary beverages;
- Building confidence in meal planning; and
- Choosing healthy foods when eating out.



Classes were taught by trained Registered Dietitian Nutritionists at the Oklahoma City Indian Clinic.

How Was This Done?

We invited American Indian adults living with type 2 diabetes who receive care at the Oklahoma City Indian Clinic (OKCIC) to join the study. OKCIC serves 22,000 patients in the Oklahoma City area who represent over 200 Tribal Nations. People who chose to join the study were randomly placed into 1 of 3 groups:

- WCIE classes and a food security resource
- Only WCIE classes
- Only food security resource

To study the impact of the classes, we measured participants':

- Confidence that they could eat a healthy diet;
- Eating habits;
- Diabetes-related quality of life;
- Blood sugar; and
- Blood pressure.

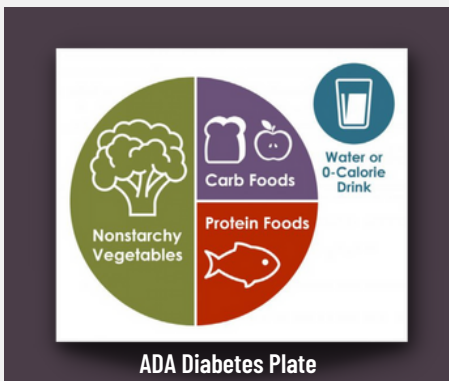
We measured these things before people started classes, after Class 4 (4 weeks after beginning the program), and after Class 5 (3 months after beginning the program).



What Did We Learn?

The study had two key results. First, the classes helped people feel more confident using the American Diabetes Association's (ADA) Diabetes Plate and making healthy food choices. Second, those who got both the classes and food security resource showed the biggest improvement in their diets.

Alongside this project, we created a simple way to look at meals from dietary recalls and see how closely they follow the ADA's Diabetes Plate. In the future, this will help programs better understand where people are doing well with their food choices, and where additional support could make healthy eating easier.



What Does It Mean?

The WCIE program can help American Indian and Alaska Native adults living with type 2 diabetes feel more confident about eating healthy and making healthy food choices.

How Can I Learn More?

Contact Sarah Stotz at sarah.stotz@colostate.edu with questions.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to all of the participants for their time and willingness to participate and to the OKCIC nutrition and diabetes health care team for their commitment to improving the lives of American Indian adults living with type 2 diabetes.

