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Research Brief

Differences in the Foods that Urban Older Black and White Women Buy and Eat



Overview

As women age, it is important for them to eat healthy foods, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and low-fat dairy products, and to limit foods with sodium, sugar, and saturated fat. A healthy diet can help them to maintain weight, health and independent living, and prevent chronic conditions and disabilities. Older Americans increasingly have a poor diet, and women who are Black are more likely to suffer from diabetes, heart disease, and strokes than women who are White. This study seeks to understand both the personal reasons for choosing different foods, as well as the how neighborhoods may affect their diet and levels of physical activity.

Main Questions

Among Black and White women in Washington, DC:

- What are the differences in foods that they purchase?
- What are the differences in foods that they eat?
- What are the differences in where they purchase their foods?
- What are the differences in where they live?

Study

The study recruited 49 White, 44 Black/African American, and 4 women of undisclosed race who were 65 years and older and living in Washington, DC. Participants answered multiple survey questions about demographics, health and health care, lifestyle factors, mental health, fall history, physical activity, nutrition, food purchasing habits, and neighborhood perception. In addition, they wore a Global Positioning Device (GPS) and answered questions about diet for 7 days. Participant information was summarized, and compared by race (White vs. Black).

The Bottom Line

There were many differences in foods that White and Black older women purchase and eat.

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Source

Li W, Youssef G, Proctor-Gray E, Olendzki B, Cornish T, Hayes R, Churchill L, Kane K, Brown K, Magee MH. Racial differences in eating patterns and food purchasing behaviors among urban older women. J Nutr Health Aging (2016). doi:10.1007/s12603-016-0834-7



Spotlight on Results

- Black women ate fewer calories than White women (mean (SD) 1314 (404) vs. 1529 (448), p=0.05)
- Black women had higher percentage of calories from protein and fat (1.8 9 (7.0), p=0.03), and a slightly higher polyunsaturated to saturated fat ratio (p=0.05).
- Black women had substantially lower diet quality as measured by the Alternate Healthy Eating Index (AHEI) (33.5 (10.2) vs. 43.9 (10.8) of 80 possible points, p<0.001), daily intake (grams) of total fiber (15.3 (8.1) vs. 22.9 (8.5), p<0.001).
- Black women had lower intake of micronutrients, alcohol and caffeine.
- Black women shopped for groceries less often (4.4 (3.0) vs. 6.2 (3.0) monthly; p=0.006) and spent a longer time traveling to stores (15.8 (9.1) vs. 11.5 (7.2) minutes per trip, p=0.02).
- A lower percent of Black women walked to stores (14% vs. 40%, p=0.003) and a higher percent of Black women rode in a car with someone else (33% vs. 6%, p<0.001).

Call for Action

Racial, socioeconomic, cultural, and neighborhood differences should be considered when designing community-based programs to promote healthy eating among urban older women.