



Department of Health

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Dear Colleague:

I hope that you are enjoying your summer! This month, I would like to address a topic we have been hearing about in the news lately – breastfeeding – and provide you with an update on how you can participate in efforts to improve New Yorkers' nutrition.

Breastfeeding: As you know, research has shown that breastfeeding reduces the risk of many childhood illnesses, including otitis media, atopic dermatitis, diarrhea, asthma, allergies, and obesity, and may provide life-long benefits, including reducing the incidence of diabetes mellitus and other chronic diseases. Mothers who breastfeed have been shown to have a lower risk of diabetes mellitus type 2, as well as breast and ovarian cancers. Breast milk provides crucial missing antibodies to the newborn during a time when the immune system is not completely developed, and adapts to the growing infant's nutritional needs. It is the healthiest food source for newborns and infants.

Despite the recognized benefits, many obstacles to breastfeeding still exist. While 87.6% of women initiate breastfeeding, only 44.8% breastfeed exclusively after discharge from the hospital. As health care providers, we can have a significant impact by supporting women and families in their choices. Many of your patients may not be aware of the resources available to them to help them meet their breastfeeding and infant nutrition goals. In addition to the education, support and lactation counseling referrals that health care providers can offer, the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides breastfeeding peer counselors, breastfeeding assessments, education, lactation counseling, and breast pumps, as well as healthy food for all participants.

The New York State Department of Health (Department) and WIC recognize and promote human breast milk as the optimal source of nutrition for infants, but it is also important to recognize that breastfeeding may not be an option for some women and their families, due to a variety of personal, health or economic reasons. Parents should not be made to feel ashamed of their feeding choices. Therefore, women who cannot breastfeed or choose not to exclusively breastfeed should be supported in that decision. To this end, all WIC local agency staff are trained to respect a mother's informed decision on her infant feeding method of choice and offer formula to families who desire that option.

On August 2nd, the University at Albany School of Public Health, in partnership with the Department, will broadcast the annual [Breastfeeding Grand Rounds](#). This two-hour live webcast is intended to reach a broad audience, including local and state public health professionals, clinicians (physicians, health care providers, nurses, nutritionists) and lactation specialists. This year's broadcast takes place on the second day of [World Breastfeeding Week](#).

Nutrition: Nutrition remains a key part of a healthy lifestyle throughout the life course. From birth to about two years of age, good nutrition is essential to support rapid growth and development. As we know, during childhood the need for good nutrition continues: it is during

this time that preferences develop and eating patterns are established, hopefully setting the stage for a lifetime of healthy eating. Energy and nutrient needs peak again during adolescence, which may make it challenging for teens to maintain a healthful diet. Beginning in middle age, caloric needs decrease yet nutrient needs remain the same; while older adults may need to increase their intake of some key nutrients. Needless to say, maintaining a healthful diet throughout the life course reduces the risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and some cancers.

While caloric needs vary, the average adult needs about 2,000 calories a day. Recently the FDA implemented a regulation that requires all restaurants and similar food retail establishments that are part of a chain with 20 or more locations to post the number of calories contained in standard items on menus/menu boards. Additionally, businesses must also provide, upon request, written nutritional information for standard menu items on total calories, total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrates, sugars, fiber, and protein. While this information is helpful, many people do not know what a healthy meal should consist of or how many calories it should contain. The Department recently launched a social media campaign, “iChoose600,” which uses the calorie counts to show how, by choosing meals with 600 calories or less, people can choose to be healthier and say no to extra calories. Changing eating habits can be difficult, but eating a little less when eating out is a powerful step that can help people maintain or lose weight and be healthier long-term. I encourage you to talk with your patients about healthy meals, the iChoose600 campaign, and the best ways to use the posted calorie counts on menus. You and your patients can find more information on menu labeling and simple ways to eat less when eating out at: www.Health.NY.gov/iChoose600 and www.Facebook.com/iChoose600.

An issue that has been consistently raised is that sugary beverages have long been linked to the increase in obesity rates. Regular consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages has consistently been shown to be associated with long-term weight gain and obesity in adults and children. In New York State, one-quarter (25.5%) of adults are obese, and more than one in five (23.2%) adults drink at least one soda or other sugary beverage per day. The Department has developed a Healthy Beverage Campaign to promote drinking water and other sugar-free beverages as a healthy alternative to sugar sweetened beverages. The campaign is being run in Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Watertown, Elmira, Binghamton, Utica, Schenectady, Albany and Poughkeepsie. These projects are being funded through a collaboration with the Office of Temporary Disability Assistance, using SNAP-Educational [resources](#).

I ask for your help in encouraging patients, especially children, to limit consumption of soda/pop, sweetened tea, sports drinks, energy drinks, and other sugary beverages. Choosing healthy beverages is one small step that can help prevent weight gain and reduce the risk of several costly and debilitating chronic diseases. Further information on this topic can be found at: https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/sugary_beverages/.

As always, thank you for the care that you provide to all New Yorkers and your attention to these critical matters.

Sincerely,

Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.