



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104

Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5534

www.adph.org

Food insecurity has an adverse nutritional impact on many Alabamians

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Molly Pettyjohn, MS, RD, LD
(334) 206-5646
mpettyjohn@adph.state.al.us

How many times have you said to yourself "Boy, I sure am hungry!"? If you're like most people it's at least once a day. When the sensation of hunger is first felt, it's usually fixed by a quick trip to the kitchen cupboard or a local restaurant.

"For many people, there is no quick fix for hunger; food is a serious concern from day to day," stated Molly Pettyjohn of the Nutrition and Physical Activity Unit of the Alabama Department of Public Health. "When a person is uncertain of his or her ability to obtain safe and nutritious food because of limited resources it is called food insecurity."

Food insecurity is an issue for a significant number of Americans, including many Alabamians. According to the USDA report, *Household Food Security in the United States, 2002*, from 2000-2002, an average of 10.8 percent of American households were food insecure. In Alabama, during the same time frame, 12.5 percent of households were found to be food insecure, putting the state above the national average.

Food insecurity is slowly rising in Alabama. It was estimated that from 1997-1999 the average percent of food insecure households was 10 percent. This estimate rose to 11.9 percent from 1999-2001 and is currently at 12.5 percent for 2000-2002. Of particular concern is that of the 12.5 percent, 3.7 percent were food insecure with hunger, meaning that at least one family member suffered from hunger because of limited access to food.

What are the health consequences of hunger? There is a definite link between hunger and health problems. Children coming from food insecure homes have more headaches, irritability, frequent colds, inability to concentrate and are less likely to interact positively with those around them. These children are also more likely to miss school because of illness.

Stunted growth is another concern that may be experienced by an undernourished child. Pregnant women suffering from food insecurity have greater chances of giving birth to a low birth weight baby as a result of an inadequate diet.

For older adults, improper nutrition may negatively impact chronic and acute diseases leading to a decrease in quality of life. More recently there have been reports on the connection between obesity and hunger, even though it seems like a contradictory relationship.

A low-income family may turn to high calorie, high fat foods that are less expensive resulting in excess weight and less nutrition. When a person has limited access to nutritious foods because of a limited income there are a number of possible negative outcomes. For more information on hunger and food insecurity in the United States go to www.frac.org.

The following are programs in Alabama that can help with food assistance:

Alabama Coalition Against Hunger

(334) 262-0359

Child Nutrition Program, State Department of Education

(334) 242-8228

Farmers Market Nutrition Programs (WIC and Seniors)

(334) 242-2618

Food Stamp Program (Automated Line)

800-382-0499

Volunteer and Information Center, Inc. for Autauga, Elmore, Dallas, Lowndes, Montgomery counties and parts of Lee County: Dial 211

WIC Program: Contact your local county health department or call 800-654-1385.

TIPS FOR A HEALTHY DIET ON A TIGHT BUDGET

Here are some suggestions to follow a healthy eating plan when money is tight:

- Plan your meals and snacks for several days. Include a variety of foods.
- Make a shopping list before going to the grocery store. Check your kitchen cupboards first to see what you already have on hand.
- Clip coupons for foods you normally eat. Check the newspaper for weekly specials.
- Make sure you are not hungry when grocery shopping. You may buy more than planned if you are hungry. Stick to your grocery list!
- Check the unit price of foods. You may find that it costs less to buy certain items in bulk. But, only buy larger amounts of foods you know will be used.
- Try the generic brand or the store brand of foods. They are usually cheaper and just as good.
- Buy fewer sweets and snack type foods. They usually cost more and are not very nutritious.
- Try meatless recipes that use less expensive foods like beans, peas and lentils.
- Cut down on your portion sizes, especially for meat. Most people eat portions that are too big.

- Save those leftovers! They can be reheated and eaten the next day or they can become part of a separate meal.

The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

5/7/04