

ETHNIC RECIPES - NETWORKING FOR PROGRESS

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Our presentation addresses the challenges and frustrations experienced in both clinical and research settings when trying to analyze nutrient content of diets for ethnic populations -both individuals as well as groups. Granted, the United States is home to a wide variety of ethnic groups, however, our discussion today will focus upon the Southeast Texas area; specifically the City of Houston, Texas and surrounding counties. The most predominant ethnic populations represented in this geographical area other than Anglos and Blacks can be classified as Mexican-American and Vietnamese. Examples of recipe variations will be presented at the workshop. The availability and diversity of ethnic food items for which there is little or no nutrient data will be explored. Methods of working together to address these obstacles will be discussed.

Obviously, food consumption within these population groups is remarkably different from the typical American diet. Attempting to use computing resources and nutrient data bases to analyze nutrient content of a typical daily intake is extremely difficult and somewhat misleading. Because the nutrient composition data for many commonly consumed items are not available in most nutrient data bases, multiple food substitutions or the omission of a reported item due to its "uniqueness" severely compromises accuracy.

We have found, particularly with Mexican-American foods, that these foods are readily available to the South Texas population in a variety of forms i.e. fast foods, frozen food, and home prepared. Nutrient composition data is sometimes available for fast foods. The difficulty lies in obtaining data for ingredients used in home recipes. Food composition data for Vietnamese foods are practically non-existent. Lack of data is not the only difficulty encountered when attempting to analyze daily intake records. Other problems include language/communication barriers, food description/identification, regional recipe differences, and determination of the representativeness of the recipe as it pertains to the general population.

The Nutrition Methodology for Epidemiological Cancer Study funded by the National Cancer Institute has been conducted in Wharton and Matagorda counties in Texas from 1984 to the present by the University of Texas System Cancer Center M. D. Anderson Hospital. This research was designed to improve the methodology for collecting dietary intake data, especially in epidemiologic studies of cancer among different ethnic groups where previous dietary history is of critical importance. This study was divided into three separate phases.

Phase 1 involved the administration of a 24-hour recall to a randomly selected target population to determine what foods people actually eat. Phases 2 and 3, which began in January of 1985, built upon the information gathered in Phase 1. Those foods which were found to be widely used in the target population were included in the food list of the food frequency instrument used in Phases 2 and 3. The overall objective of this research was to develop a valid and reliable food frequency instrument which could provide retrospective dietary information on different ethnic groups.

In order to supplement the data in the nutrient data base at the Department of Cancer Prevention at the University of Texas M. D. Anderson Hospital and St. Luke's Episocpal Hospital/Texas Children's Hospital/Texas Heart Institute, the following sources were contacted:

1. Human Nutrition Information Service, USDA
2. University of Texas Health Science Center, San Antonio
3. University of Arizona
4. Food manufacturers
5. County extension agents
6. Other local researchers

Sharing nutrient data as it applies to research and/or hospital applications has proven to be mutually beneficial to both institutions. In addition, it has saved much valuable time and more importantly, has helped us as professionals to expand our network.