

VENA and Nutrition Risk

I. Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment.

- a. Value Enhanced Nutrition Assessment (VENA) is an initiative from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to improve nutrition services in the WIC program. VENA provides WIC nutrition assessment guidance to enhance and ensure the collection and interpretation of accurate and relevant nutrition and health information - the first step in providing targeted and relevant nutrition services to WIC participants.
- b. VENA is the bridge that connects WIC nutrition assessment to effective and appropriate nutrition intervention that best meets each participant's needs. It provides information and guidance to enable WIC staff to perform a quality WIC nutrition assessment that screens for nutrition risk criteria (anthropometric, biochemical, and dietary) as well as other health indicators (clinical/health/medical and predisposing risks). The collection of comprehensive, relevant nutrition assessment information is necessary to deliver meaningful nutrition services to WIC participants.
- c. A quality WIC nutrition assessment is a blending of art and science. It requires staff well-trained in communication, critical thinking skills, and fundamentals of assessment using a systematic approach to collect accurate and essential nutrition assessment information.
- d. VENA is incorporated into the VISION computer system with starters and prompts at the bottom of each nutrition interview screen. Scroll through these to find the appropriate open-ended questions for the applicable nutrition interview section. It is necessary to complete all bolded questions and items in each nutrition interview screen to ensure accurate data reporting. If nutrition risks factors (NRFs) that impact nutritional status are identified after the initial certification visit, these must be documented in the risk screen or care plan in VISION.
- e. The process of a quality WIC nutrition assessment includes:
 - i. Collect accurate and essential information,
 - ii. Apply communication skills to foster openness and rapport with the participant,
 - iii. Organize, synthesize, and evaluate the collected information,
 - iv. Draw appropriate conclusions and relationships from the information collected,
 - v. Identify solutions, prioritize the issues discovered, develop a plan of care,
 - vi. Document the information and conclusions concisely and accurately,
 - vii. Refer to other needed resources,

viii. Close the loop – provide follow-up as necessary.

- f. The collection of comprehensive, relevant nutrition assessment information is necessary to deliver meaningful nutrition services to WIC participants. When conducting a nutrition assessment, the CPA must open a new nutrition interview record at the certification appointment, identify and assign all NRFs for which an applicant qualifies, provide and document nutrition intervention and education and refer to other health-related services. After a nutrition assessment based on NRFs assigned, the participant will be placed at the highest possible priority. Nutrition services should be based upon the participant's highest priority needs and their interests and requests. Intervention and education are not required on all identified nutrition risk factors.

II. Nutrition Risk

- a. Nutrition risk is a requirement for certification in the WIC program. It is defined broadly by Public Law 94-105 as, "(a) detrimental or abnormal nutritional conditions detectable by biochemical or anthropometric measures, (b) other documented nutritionally related medical conditions, (c) dietary deficiencies that impair or endanger health, (d) conditions that predispose persons to inadequate nutritional patterns or nutritionally related medical conditions." (WIC Nutrition Risk Criteria, A Scientific Assessment, Institute of Medicine, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 1996) The general categories of nutrition risk include:
- Anthropometric
 - Biochemical
 - Clinical/Health/Medical
 - Dietary
 - Other
- b. RISC is the National Risk Identification and Selection Collaborative which is made up of appointed federal and state representatives. The purpose of RISC is to develop, review, research, and update each of the risks on a cyclic basis in response to emerging research. Each state WIC agency is allowed to determine which nutrition risks are to be considered "high-risk" and which risks are to be considered "low-risk". The Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommends that nutrition risks that have a strong relationship to risk and potential to benefit from the services of the WIC program be considered high-risk.
- c. Nutrition Risk Assessment. Nutrition risk assessment is critical to the operation of the WIC Program. It is essential for determining program eligibility. Nutrition risk assessment involves the use of a risk criterion

which consists of a risk indicator and a cut-off point. According to the IOM, “a risk indicator is any measurable characteristic or circumstance that is associated with an increased likelihood of poor outcomes, such as poor nutrition status, poor health, or death” (Summary Report, 1996). The cutoff point represents a specific measurable value or the existence of a condition. Nutrition risk assessments are conducted by Competent Professional Authorities (CPAs) as defined by Federal Regulations. The process of nutrition risk assessment involves review of the general categories of nutrition risk including, anthropometric, biochemical, clinical/health/medical, dietary, and other.

- d. The summary of nutrition risk auto-assignment and high-risk assignment can be found in the Utah Nutrition Risk Factor Mini Manual.