

Factors Affecting Nutrition and Oral Health in Senior Box Program Participants in Houston

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Objectives: The objective of this study was to examine the factors affecting nutrition and oral health in seniors enrolled in the Houston Food Bank Senior Box Program, a federally-funded national food distribution effort that provides a monthly box of food to low income seniors to improve their health, nutrition, and well-being.

Experimental Methods: The study subjects consisted of a convenience sample of seniors who were enrolled in the Houston Food Bank Senior Box Program. A semi-structured interview that addressed nutrition and oral health issues was conducted. The results were sorted by question, and the data was qualitatively analyzed for trends.

Results: When discussing senior eating habits, 44 out of 50 participants reported they were eating regularly. 9 participants reported eating less than 3 meals a day. Reasons for the decreased food consumption were reported as decreased appetite, decreased food options, needing care from others, too busy, or the increased cost of food. Approximately half of seniors reported no problems with eating. The other half reported eating challenges due to mouth pain (6 out of 50 participants), ill-fitting dentures (11 out of 50), no teeth, as well as non-dental factors such as changing appetite or diet modifications (3 out of 50).

Conclusion: This study reported factors that influence senior nutrition, such as decreased food consumption, decreased access to food, ill-fitting dental appliances, and painful or missing dentition. Factors indicated in this study support research conducted by Wu et al. 2017, who concluded that elders' unmet dental needs were associated with decreased quality of life and increased likelihood for malnutrition.

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