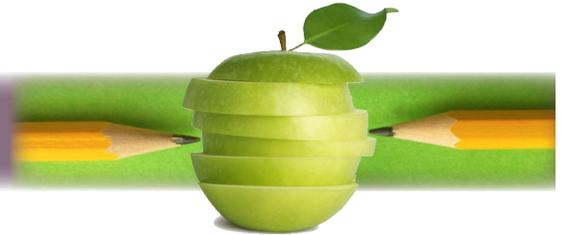




## Nurturing & Supporting Food Insecure Clients\*



### Get to know your client

You can get to know a lot about someone's food habits by asking about their family, children, work and leisure activities. Start your communications where the client/family is ready to start. Make your interactions flow more like a conversation rather than an assessment. Find ways to determine their real story, which they may be uncomfortable or possibly afraid and ashamed to share. Discovering the root of the problem will help guide your support. Some questions to help you learn more about a client's situation could include:

- What brings you here today?
- What kind of food do you like?  
What are your favorite meals?
- Do you live with someone?  
Who does the cooking and shopping?
- How well equipped is your kitchen?  
Do you have a stove, fridge?
- Where do you get your food from (e.g. shopping, food programs, gardens)?
- Do you ever find it hard to make food last (throughout the month)? Do you worry about not having enough food? Do you ever go hungry because there is no food?
- Are you on any type of income assistance or support? Do you receive a "Diet Supplement" or the "Monthly Nutritional Supplement"? (For details on supplements refer to "BC Provincial Nutrition Benefits Programs"<sup>1</sup>)

### Avoid making assumptions about the health and food priorities of your clients

Although they may recently have been diagnosed with diabetes, for example, eating a healthier diet may not be at the top of their priority list. Putting food of any type on the table may be difficult enough without worrying about what type of food. Let go of the concept of perfect meals. Accept small steps such as a client eating one more healthy food per day. Focus on the positive.

### Be the nutrition resource

Consider introducing yourself as a food and nutrition resource. Offering nutrition benefit program information for clients on income assistance<sup>2</sup> or food resource contacts may be more appropriate than a client handout or education tool. For example, pointing out a convenient location to buy day-old bread or produce may be more appropriate than reviewing a therapeutic diet handout. Have client-appropriate, evidence-based information on hand such as "Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide for First Nations"<sup>3</sup> and translated versions of the Food Guide. Refer to Practice-based Evidence in Nutrition (PEN)<sup>4</sup> to find tools for low income clients, including "Healthy Eating Cheap and Easy"<sup>5</sup> and "Healthy Eating is in Store for You"<sup>6</sup>.

### Follow up

Find a way to check back with your client to see how they are doing and if they need more support around food. They may feel more comfortable during a second encounter. There can be questions that they did not think of when they first met with you, or it may be an opportunity for you to learn more about their situation and what might be most helpful.

### Refer

You don't have to do it all! You are a valuable link to community resources for your client. Familiarize yourself with local food resources to be an effective referral initiator. Consider making referrals to other professionals such as a social worker or liaison nurse.

## Resource Dietitians

In British Columbia, the following dietitians have agreed to offer support to other dietitians who need guidance when working with low income clients. They may not have all the answers but they have experience and may be able to offer advice and link you to local programs and resources in your community. There are many dietitians across BC with expertise.

### Vancouver Coastal Health

**Carol Ranger**

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**Ellie Schmidt**

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### Fraser Health

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### Vancouver Island Health

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### Nanaimo/Duncan

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### Interior Health

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**Kamloops**

**Ellen Duncan**

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### Northern Health

**Flo Sheppard**

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### References

- 1 BC Provincial Nutrition Benefits Programs. January 2009. [www.dialadietitian.org](http://www.dialadietitian.org)
- 2 Ibid
- 3 Health Canada. 2007. Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide - First Nations, Inuit and Métis. <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/fnim-pnim/index-eng.php>
- 4 Dietitians of Canada. Practice-based Evidence in Nutrition (PEN). <http://www.dieteticsatwork.com/pen/>
- 5 Ministry of Health. 2002. Healthy Eating Cheap and Easy. <http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2002/HealthyEatingdoc.pdf>
- 6 Dietitians of Canada. Healthy Eating is in Store for You. [http://www.healthyeatingisinstore.ca/program\\_resources.asp#consumer](http://www.healthyeatingisinstore.ca/program_resources.asp#consumer)

\* This resource was inspired by a resource prepared by dietitians in the Vancouver Island Health Authority to support dietitians working with food insecure clients.