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## Nutrition Security – Why it Matters?

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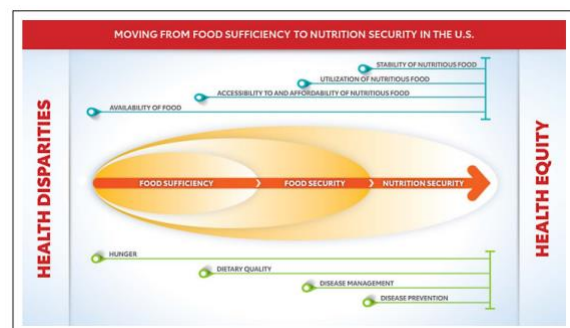
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### Overview

Food security and nutrition security, though closely related, are clearly different. While food security is concerned with individuals having sufficient food to avoid hunger, nutrition security goes beyond having adequate food and focuses on dietary healthfulness to promote health and wellbeing (Gupta, Utah State extension, 2023). Evidence suggests that 600,000 Americans die each year due to diet related diseases.

Moreover, diet-related chronic diseases overly impact communities with high food insecurity. Given the rising cost of food prices, individuals and households are forced to make difficult decisions such as paying other important bills or buying food, this often leads to buying cheaper, less nutritious foods, or simply not being able to afford food at all, this ultimately leads to poor health outcomes (USDA, FNS, 2022; Jones et al, 2023; Gupta, Utah State Extension, 2023).

Although many food policies and programs in the United States of America (USA) are designed to address food insecurity, there has been rising interest to focus on a broader construct concerned with the nutritional adequacy of food (Jones et al., 2013). Nutrition security is defined as having stable access to healthy, safe, and affordable foods that promote optimal health and well-being (USDA, FNS, 2022).



**Figure 1.** Moving from food sufficiency to nutrition security in the United States.

**Source:** Thorndike et al; American Heart Association Advocacy Coordinating Committee. Strengthening US food policies and programs to promote equity in nutrition security: a policy statement from the American Heart Association.

## Quick Facts

- In 2023, Tennessee food insecurity rate was 11.7%, close to the national average of 12.2% (USDA, ERS, 2023).
- Adults in Tennessee eat less than one fruit or vegetable a day (Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease).
- Over 809,000 Tennesseans experience limited access to food, of which 233,000 are children (Tn Department of Health).
- Sixty-eight (68%) percent of adults in Tennessee are overweight or obese (Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease).
- Tennessee is projected to spend \$1 trillion on chronic disease between 2016 – 2030 (Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease).

## Why Nutrition Security Matter?

- Nutrition security is a key component to proper nutrition which leads to good health and plays a critical role in reducing the risk of diet-related diseases such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and many other diet related diseases across life span (USDA, FNS, 2022).
- Nutrition security is also vital to vulnerable populations such as children, pregnant and lactating mothers, and people with limited

financial resources. Children, pregnant, and breastfeeding mothers all require proper nutrition for optimal growth and development (USDA, FNS, 2022)

- Nutrition security can also lead to a healthy workforce, ultimately leading to increased economic output (USDA, FNS, 2022).
- Beyond health, addressing nutrition insecurity saves the nation on healthcare cost as it has been estimated that eighty-five percent of healthcare spending is related to diet related chronic diseases (Thorndike et al, 2022).

## Food is Medicine Approach to Improve Nutrition Security and Health

The foundation of nutrition security lies in making sure that nutritious foods are consistently available, accessible, and affordable (Thorndike et al, 2022; Mozaffarian et al, 2022), therefore, healthy food across the lifespan is essential to achieve optimal health. Hence, one of the strategies adopted to ensure nutrition security is a priority and addressed is the Food is Medicine (FIM) framework.

The FIM framework was created to provide a research-based, community-centered guideline to support various leaders who implement and measure the effects of FIM interventions. The FIM interventions and programs are arranged from prevention at the base of the pyramid to treatment at the top (FIM Coalition). Starting from the top of the pyramid, more intensive treatments are designed for sicker patients, to less intensive

treatments for a larger subset of patients who are less ill, and to the base of the pyramid are population-level healthy food policies and programs (Mozaffarian et al, 2022). See below a visual representation of the FIM framework.



**Figure 2.** The Food is Medicine Pyramid

**Source:** Mozaffarian D, Blanck HM, Grafield KM, et al, 2022. A Food is Medicine to achieve nutrition security and health. *Nat Med.* 2022 Nov;28(11):2238-2240.

## Nutrition Security in Tennessee

The Tennessee Department of Health encourages collaborative groups to use evidence-informed, actionable steps to address priority areas. Collaborative groups and individuals can adopt the following strategies to address nutrition insecurity and improve healthy eating.

- **Consider applying for federal food assistance programs:** Depending on household income levels, there are several federal programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) Program,

Summer Electronic Benefit Program (Summer EBT), free and reduced school lunches. Please visit the [Tennessee Department of Human Services to learn more about how to apply](#) for SNAP benefits.

- **Access local food resources:** Aside from federal programs, there are many local food resources such as food banks, food pantries, United Way, Food boxes, 211 Tn, Tn story map, the farmers market nutrition program, and many other resources individuals and households can explore if they need resources for healthy foods. Please visit <https://www.findhelp.org/v2/favorites/public/tennessee-food-resources> to find more food resources. In addition, individuals looking to access fresh produce can look across Tennessee to find farmers markets and community gardens. These can especially increase healthy food access in areas with limited access to grocery stores.
- **Promote healthy eating habits:** In addition to accessing healthy food resources, individuals can achieve nutrition security by learning about nutrition education programs that offer nutrition education lessons to help you understand healthy eating habits and making healthy meals. Tennessee State University Cooperative Extension has programs such as Snap Ed and EFNEP that offer nutrition classes at your local county office. Please visit your local county office to learn more about

how to receive free nutrition education lessons.

## References

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