

FROM BENEFITS TO PLATE

Assessing the Impact of Nutritional Assistance Program Enrollment on Dietary Choices

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INTRODUCTION

Nearly half of UC students experience food insecurity.¹ SNAP/EBT provides financial assistance for groceries to low-income individuals, including students.²

- Impact of SNAP/EBT enrollment on college students' dietary choices is unclear.
- Healthier dietary choices can mitigate adverse health effects of food insecurity, high BMI and chronic diseases.¹
- Average monthly benefit of about \$184 per recipient (2020-21).³

OBJECTIVES

Analyze differences in:

- Dietary choices
- Food insecurity
- Grocery shopping habits
- Portion sizes
- Consumption frequency of key food groups

METHODS

- **Target population:** UC San Diego undergraduates
- Qualtrics survey system
- Mix of self-reporting questions and split survey format
- Confidential and voluntary
- Distributed through advisors, professors, and fellow students
- Survey was taken by 146 students

RESULTS

Figure 1: Percentage of Survey Participants Receiving SNAP/EBT Benefits

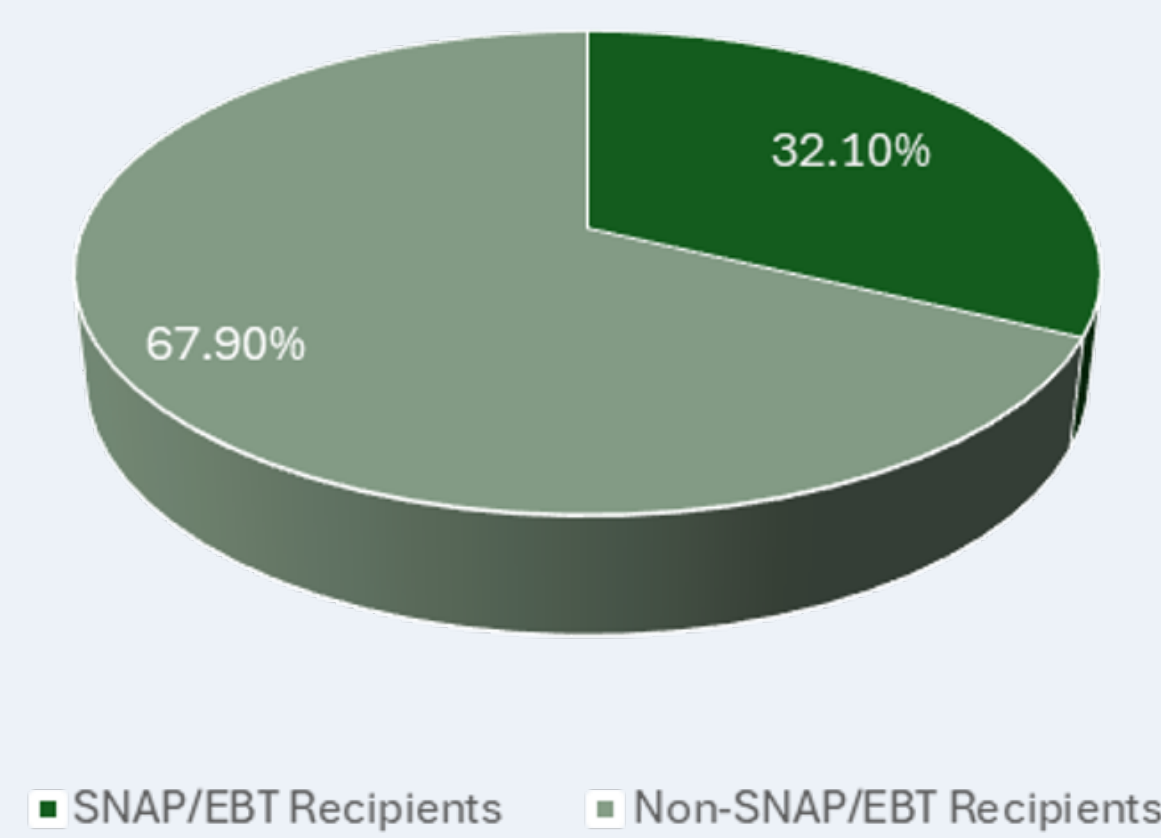


Figure 3: Average Consumed Portion Sizes of Key Food Groups Between EBT Recipients and Non-EBT Recipients

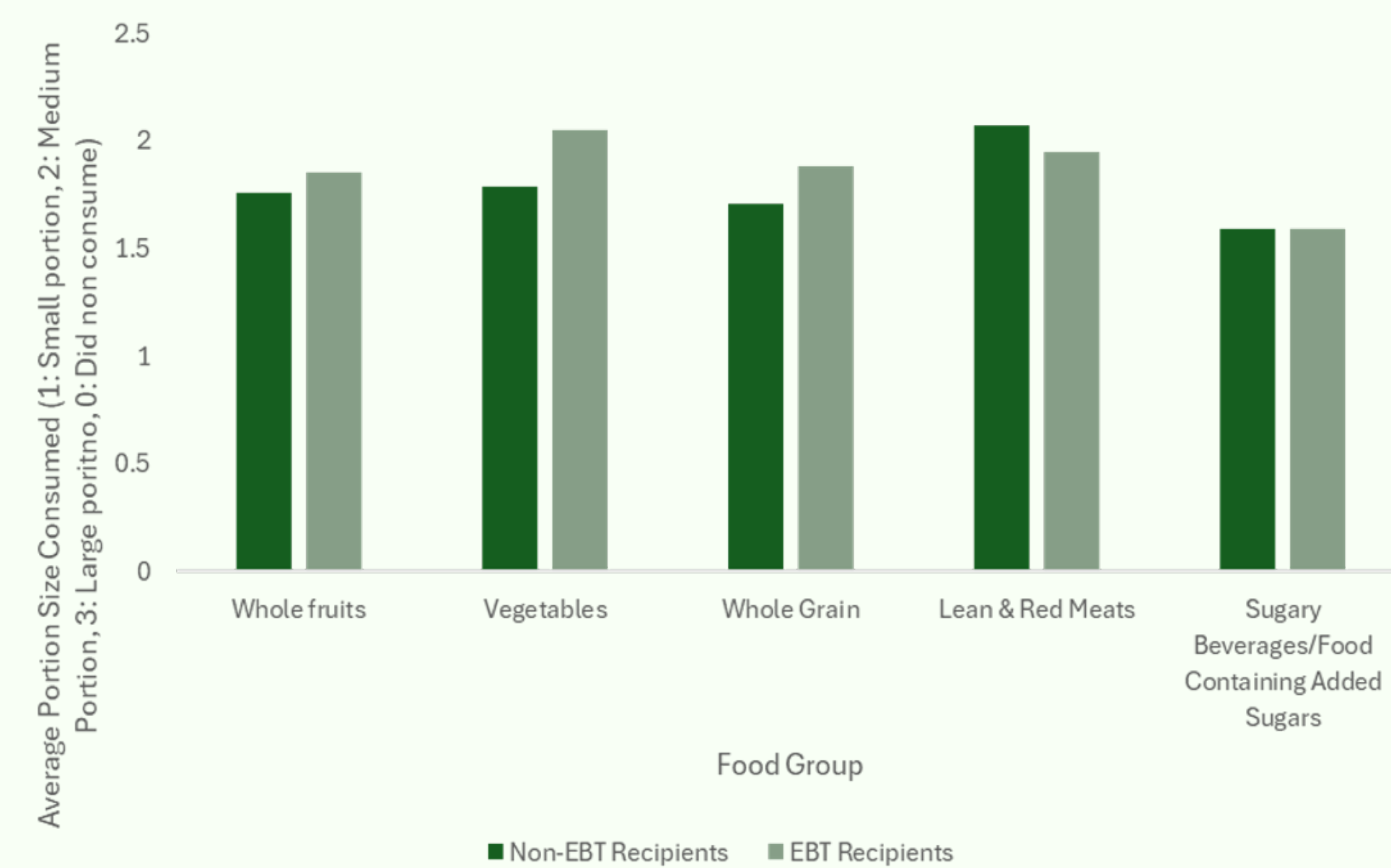


Figure 3: Average Consumed Portion Sizes of Key Food Groups Between EBT Recipients and Non-EBT Recipients. We used the same food groups from the HEI to take data from respondents on the serving size they consumed for each food group. Respondents were provided with a description and example of a medium serving size for each food group.⁴ A small serving size was classified as a 1, a medium serving size was classified as a 2, a large serving size was classified as 3, and non-consumption was classified as a 0.

Figure 5: Hand visuals used as references for common portion sizes

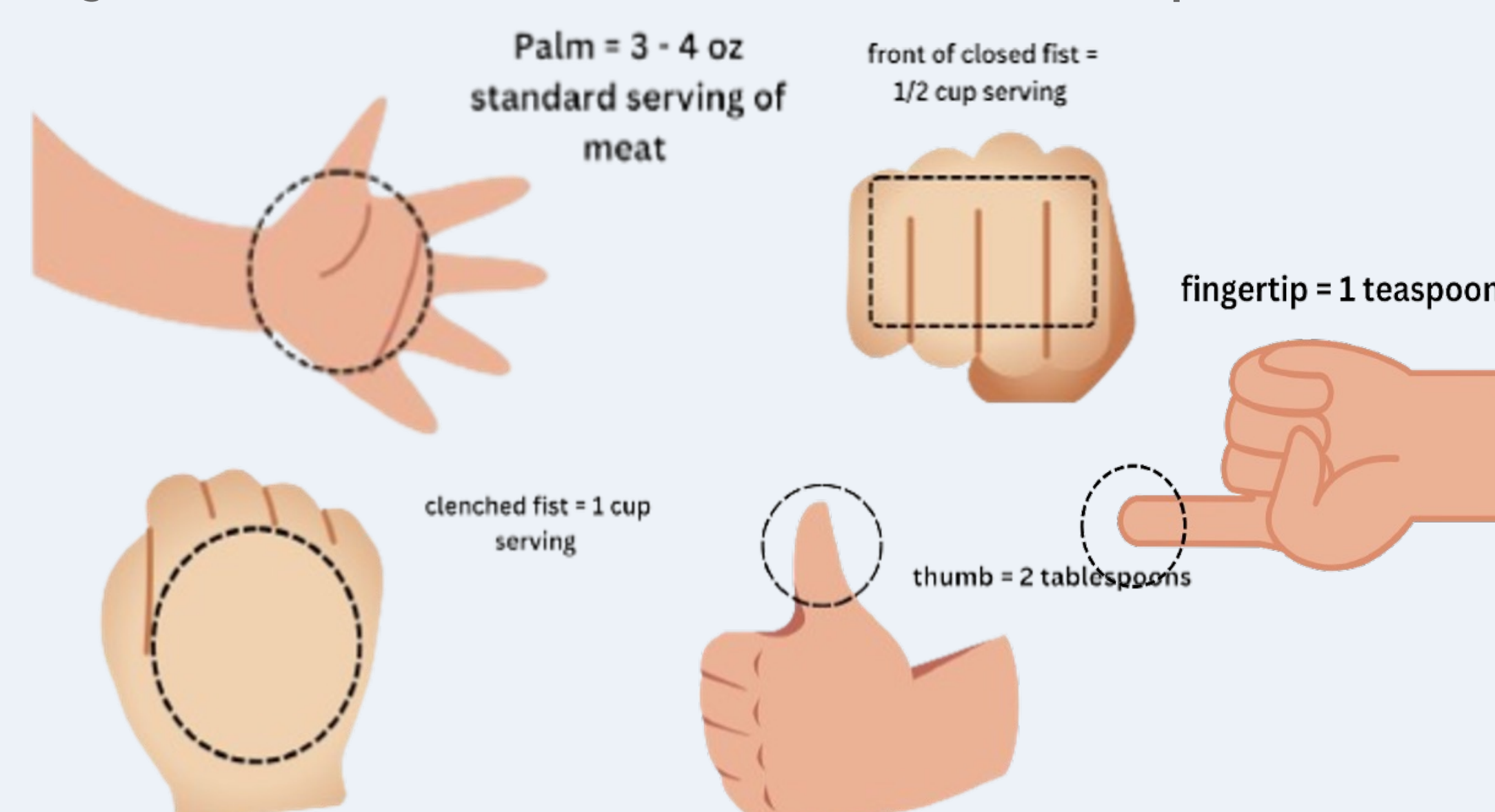


Figure 2: Daily Consumption of Key Food Groups by EBT and Non-EBT Recipients

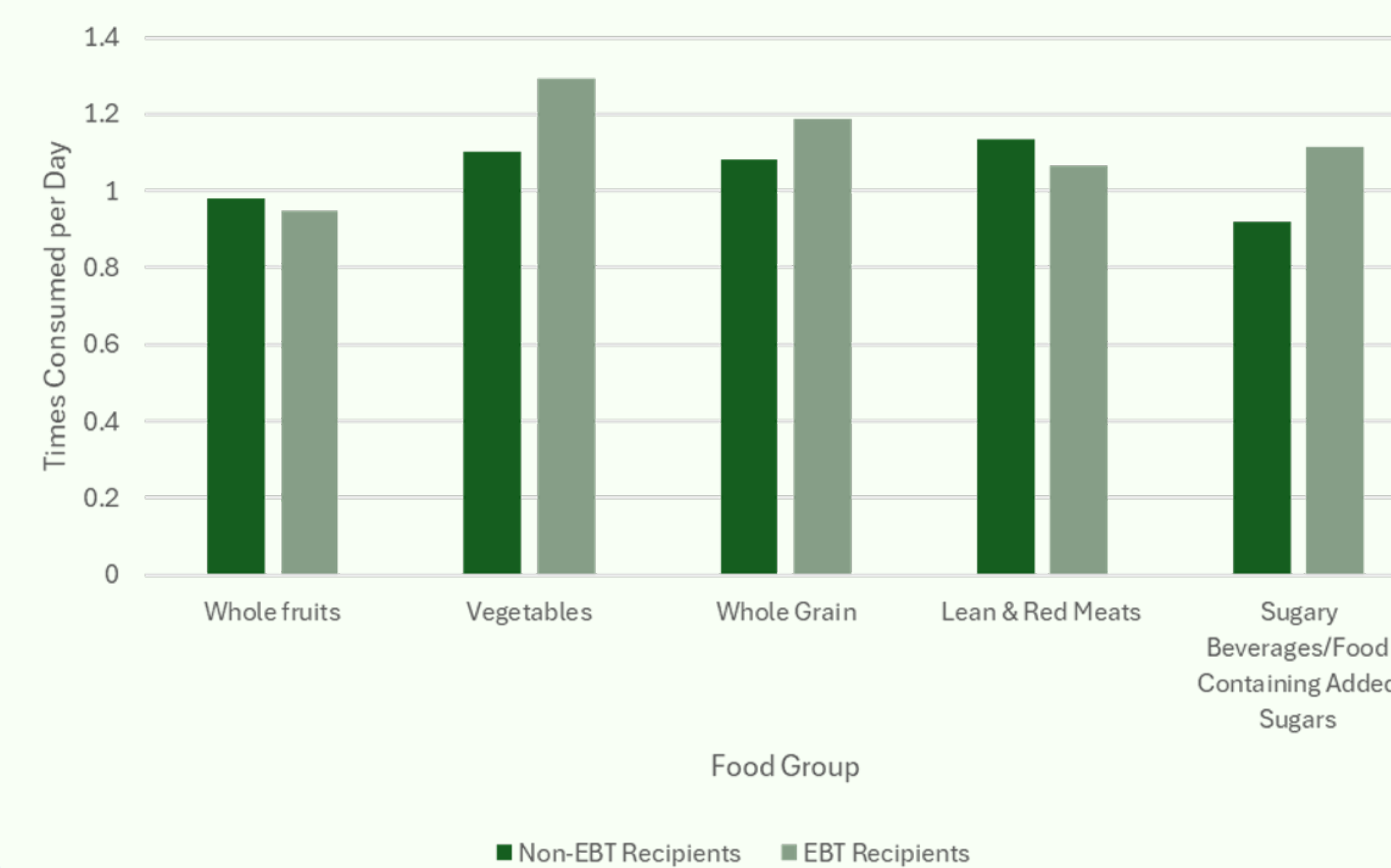


Figure 2: Difference in Daily Consumption of Key Food Groups by EBT and Non-EBT Recipients. Used the Healthy Eating Index (HEI)⁴ to identify key food groups present in a healthy diet, and the Food Frequency Questionnaire (FFQ)⁵ to determine how to measure frequency. Participant data was used to compile daily averages of consumption for each food group for EBT recipients and non-EBT recipients.

Figure 4: Meals Skipped Per Week by Percentages of Total Meals Skipped Between EBT Recipients and Non-EBT Recipients

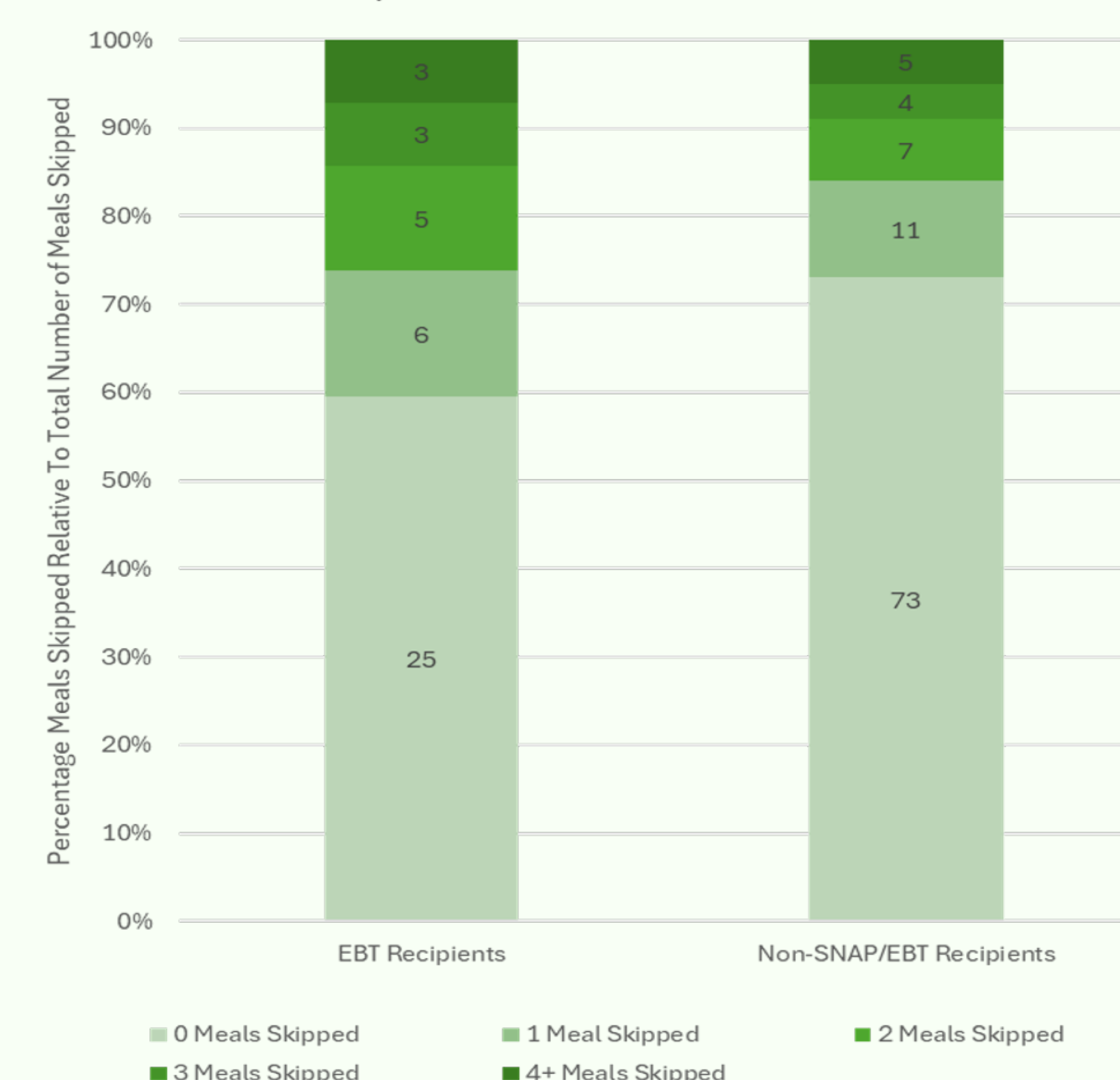


Figure 4: Meals Skipped Per Week by Percentages of Total Meals Skipped Between EBT Recipients and Non-EBT Recipients. Calculated percentages for each frequency of meals skipped per week relative to total number of meals skipped by EBT recipients and non-EBT recipients.

CONCLUSION

SNAP/EBT positively affects nutrition, but does not eliminate gaps in food insecurity

SNAP/EBT recipients:

- Have higher perception of healthy diet
- Can afford more nutritious food
- Showed modified grocery shopping habits
- Accounted for nutritional content of food
- **Skipped meals more frequently**

Future Research:

- Prospective cohort study to follow EBT applicants dietary patterns before and after EBT enrollment
- Recruit participants from lower income areas; many UCSD students may have greater access to healthier groceries due to geographic location

POLICY IMPLICATION

Problem:

- 40% of SNAP/EBT recipients had to skip at least one meal per week

Possible Solutions:

- Increase funding to reduce meal skipping among SNAP/EBT recipients
- Review and adjust benefit amounts to match the rising cost of nutritious foods

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Scan for references!

