

# For diabetes, high blood pressure, the prescription is fruits and veggies

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People line up to receive fresh produce at Oak Forest Health Center in Oak Forest, Illinois, September 22, 2016. Six health clinics are working with the Chicago food bank to host a mobile pantry filled with fresh produce. AP Photo/Tae-Gyun Kim

OAK FOREST, Ill. — A simple idea to solve a widespread problem: Load fresh fruits and vegetables into a refrigerator truck and drive it to a health clinic, then have a doctor write a "prescription" for food to improve the diets of low-income people with diabetes and high blood pressure.

## "Food As Medicine"

U.S. food banks, organizations on the front lines of fighting hunger, are increasingly promoting "food as medicine" strategies designed to address the high rate of long-term health problems among the poor.

One-third of households using food banks have a family member with diabetes, according to a recent survey by Feeding America, a national network of 200 food banks. More than half have a family member with high blood pressure. Meanwhile, 55 percent of people identify fresh fruits and vegetables as the foods they most desire but aren't receiving from their food bank.

"I'm on a very limited income," said James Cline, who has diabetes and gets by on \$700 a month living with his mother in suburban Chicago. The 53-year-old was a former loading dock worker who was disabled after an all-terrain vehicle accident. He knows he should eat more fresh produce. But the cost of a nutritious diet can be out of reach, so he took his doctor's advice and showed up for a recent produce giveaway at Oak Forest Health Center.

## **"Fresh Truck" Visits**

"It helps a lot," he said.

Since August 2015, six Chicago-area clinics have hosted 26 "Fresh Truck" visits by the Greater Chicago Food Depository. They have been providing more than 100,000 pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables to more than 3,200 households.

Nationally, 30 food banks are working directly with health care providers to identify low-income patients who sometimes run out of food. In Idaho, doctors in Boise and Caldwell plan to add small food pantries to their offices. In Delaware, pediatricians write "prescriptions" for fresh produce; a family can get up to 25 pounds each month distributed by the local food bank at clinics. Two hospitals, in Alabama and Florida, collaborated with a Gulf Coast food bank to offer free lunches during the summer to children with hospitalized relatives.

## **Figuring It Out**

"Food banks are trying to do better by providing fewer starches and carbs and more lean proteins, fruits, vegetables and whole grains," said Dr. Hilary Seligman, senior medical adviser for Feeding America. "The nutritious foods that are expensive for our clients are also expensive for food banks. We're figuring out how we can do this and do it better."

Seligman is leading a clinical trial to measure if food banks can help people with diabetes improve their blood sugar levels through education and tailored food packages. Researchers have enrolled 572 food pantry clients in Detroit, Houston and Oakland, California. Results are expected in 2018.

"If this works, we'll spread it across the Feeding America network, and if it doesn't, we'll try something else," Seligman said.

## **No Candy, No Soda**

Food banks, whose supplies are stocked through purchases and food donations, have hired dietitians to teach classes. Some are barring donations of sweets.

"We don't accept candy. We don't accept soda," said Kim Turner of the Delaware Food Bank. "We want to make sure the foods we're giving to low-income people are the best nutrition possible."

Food banks distributed 1.25 billion pounds of fresh produce from July 2015 through June this year.

### **Grocers Pitch In**

"That's double what it was five years earlier," said Ross Fraser of Feeding America, adding that food banks rescue perishable fruits and vegetables with "cosmetic issues" otherwise headed for the trash. "Produce that is too small, too big, too round or not round enough."

Growers have answered the call, said Idaho Food Bank CEO Karen Vauk.

"Boy, did they respond," Vauk said. "We have certainly been overwhelmed by the increase in produce. Most of it is right out of the field. And it's not all potatoes. It's peaches and plums. Beautiful produce."

### **"A Big Help"**

On Thursday, Cline showed a visitor the bananas, onions, cantaloupe, potatoes, kale and other produce in the box he was taking home.

"It's a big help," he said.

## Quiz

- 1 Which of the follow sentences from the article BEST develops its central idea?
- (A) Meanwhile, 55 percent of people identify fresh fruits and vegetables as the foods they most desire but aren't receiving from their food bank.
  - (B) But the cost of a nutritious diet can be out of reach, so he took his doctor's advice and showed up for a recent produce giveaway at Oak Forest Health Center.
  - (C) They have been providing more than 100,000 pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables to more than 3,200 households.
  - (D) On Thursday, Cline showed a visitor the bananas, onions, cantaloupe, potatoes, kale and other produce in the box he was taking home.

- 2 Read the sentence from the section "No Candy, No Soda."

*Food banks, whose supplies are stocked through purchases and food donations, have hired dietitians to teach classes.*

Does this sentence support the MAIN idea of the article? Why or why not?

- (A) Yes, because it explains how food banks are working to help people eat healthier.
  - (B) Yes, because it describes the healthy foods people can get at food banks.
  - (C) No, because it does not discuss how eating healthy food is important.
  - (D) No, because it does not explain how healthy foods become so expensive.
- 3 What is the relationship between the introduction [paragraph 1] and the final section, "A Big Help"?
- (A) The introduction explains how eating healthy food is expensive; the final section lists the ways that people can get fresh produce for free.
  - (B) The introduction explains why fresh produce is more expensive than junk food; the final section explains which fruits and vegetables should be eaten in a healthy diet.
  - (C) The introduction discusses the role of doctors in encouraging healthy eating; the final section emphasizes the actions people can take to improve their diets.
  - (D) The introduction describes a solution to help people eat healthier; the final section illustrates a person benefitting from that solution.

- 4 Read the paragraph from the section "Food As Medicine."

*One-third of households using food banks have a family member with diabetes, according to a recent survey by Feeding America, a national network of 200 food banks. More than half have a family member with high blood pressure. Meanwhile, 55 percent of people identify fresh fruits and vegetables as the foods they most desire but aren't receiving from their food bank.*

What does this paragraph accomplish?

- (A) It emphasizes how eating unhealthy food affects the human body.
- (B) It criticizes families who do not eat fresh fruits and vegetables regularly.
- (C) It explains why it is difficult for some people to maintain a healthy diet.
- (D) It describes how doctors are working with food banks to make healthy food more available.