4-2   Selecting and Assigning Risks

How are the participant's risks assigned?

Each participant is assigned nutrition risks during the certification appointment. This part of the appointment is called the **assessment**. An assessment is when the certifier gathers information from the participant and uses that information to assign risks.

Gathering information from the participant in order to complete the assessment is as much art as it is science. It is the art of conversation. It is up to the certifier to engage the participant in a conversation about their health and diet, and to do it in such a way that the participant feels comfortable *and* the certifier gets the information they need.

It is important to note that **all** of the assessment steps are used to determine eligibility. Only after all of the information is gathered for a full assessment, is it time to provide counseling and nutrition education. This saves time by helping you narrow down the most important topics to cover.

Remember ABCDE?

Nutrition risks are selected based on what you learn from the participant. You will record the information you gather in the data system.

There are 3 ways that risks are identified:
1. The data system automatically identifies a risk based on data you enter;
2. You select answers to questions in the data system that identifies a risk; or,
3. You select a nutrition risk from a list of options based on what you learn.

Risk Group	What you do	How are risks selected
Anthropometric 100's	You enter measurements into the data system.	The data system assigns risks based on what you enter.
Biochemical 200's	You enter blood test results in the data system.	The data system assigns risks based on what you enter.

Risk Group	What you do	How are risks selected
Clinical 300's **D**ietary 400's **E**nvironmental 500's, 600's, 700's, 800's	1. During intake, staff select answers to questions about migrancy or homelessness. 2. You select answers to questions in the data system. 3. You interview the participant and learn of a risk.	1. The data system assigns risk based on which answers are selected. 2. The data system assigns risk based on which answer you select. 3. You select the risk from a list in the data system.

What information is used to select risks?

The information used to assess participants for nutrition risks comes from several places.

Source of information	How you get it	Example
Collected by WIC staff	You collect the information needed to assign the risk as part of the certification process.	WIC measures and weighs participants. This provides the information needed to assign an anthropometric risk.
Historical data	For participants who are being recertified, WIC has information from previous certifications.	The data system keeps track of the weight gain of an infant over several visits to WIC. This information is used to determine if the infant is growing at the correct rate for their age.
Provided by the participant	The participant will tell you about their circumstances during the interview	The participant tells you about their health habits, meal patterns and living situation.
Information received from the health care provider	Participants might bring information from their health care provider about their medical history which could be used to assign a risk.	An infant has a prescription for a special formula which also lists information about the infant's medical diagnosis. This information is then used to enter a clinical risk.

Source of information	How you get it	Example
Self-reported by participant	WIC allows participants to self-report that their doctor has diagnosed them with a health condition.	A participant tells you that her doctor has diagnosed her with gestational diabetes.

The data system will help guide the assessment

The data system will help you remember what kinds of information you are looking for. The data system has a series of standard questions related to the ABCDE's of risk assessment that will remind you of what to talk to the participant about. The questions cover broad topic areas related to health, family environment, feeding behaviors, attitudes about food or feeding, actions related to food or feeding, and supplementation.

Which questions do you need to answer?

There are 2 types of questions in the data system.
1. Mandatory questions – which means you must answer them.
2. Optional questions – which means that in certain circumstances you do not need to answer them.

> **You must assess for all the different topics in the data system questionnaires, regardless of whether the question is mandatory to answer or not.**

Learning activity

Review the 4 job aids that go with this lesson:
- *Job Aid: Selecting Risks – Pregnant*
- *Job Aid: Selecting Risks – Postpartum*
- *Job Aid: Selecting Risks – Infants*
- *Job Aid: Selecting Risks – Children*

How can you tell which questions are mandatory to answer?

How can you tell which answer selection will generate a risk automatically in the data system?

Personalizing the assessment questions

The data system provides prompts that will assist you in asking questions related to specific risks, but these are **only** prompts. They are not intended to act as a script that must be read or followed word-for-word.

- The data system questions are close-ended, because they are to collect specific answers. We know that you will learn more by asking open-ended questions.
  - It is okay to change the questions into your own words to make them open-ended.
  - Even if you reword the questions, you can still select the right answer for that given question in the data system, in order to assign a risk.
  - The conversation will move from open-ended questions to more specific probing questions, as you discuss their health and feeding behaviors.
  - Open-ended questions encourage participants to explore their feelings and thoughts about a subject and will provide more detailed information than close-ended questions.
- It is okay to ask the questions in a different order, as long as you gather the necessary information by covering all the topic areas.
- The assessment questions are a guide, not a script. Both you and the participant will feel more comfortable having a conversation, rather than asking a series of close-ended questions.

Learning activity

Use the *Job Aid: Selecting Risks – Pregnant* to answer questions about the case study.

Case study
Sophia is 3 months pregnant. Her only child, Max, is a 2-year old child already on WIC. When she comes to your office, you smell cigarette smoke.

What would you take into consideration before you started the assessment?

Based on what you know so far, how would you change the questions in the data system?

Personalized assessment questions

When completing the assessment, you will want to use your own words to ask the questions in the data system. Here are some examples from different situations that show how you could reword the data system questions while still gathering the same information.

Data system question	Your question
Have you had any medical problems with this or any previous pregnancy?	"Tell me about any medical problems you are having with your pregnancy? What about when you were pregnant before"
How can you tell when your baby is hungry or full?	"What are some ways that she lets you know she's ready to eat? How does she act when she is done eating?"
How often does your baby breastfeed in 24 hours?	"How many times a day is she letting you know she's ready to breastfeed?"

Learning activity

Practice re-writing the assessment questions from the data system in your own words.

- What foods, if any, do you avoid for health or other reasons?

- What is your plan for introducing infant cereal and baby foods to your baby?

- How well does your child feed himself/herself?

Change these close-ended assessment questions into open-ended questions.

- Is your child receiving fluoride?

- If using a bottle, does your baby fall asleep with the bottle at nap or bedtime?

- Have you had any medical problems with this or any previous pregnancy?

- Do you eat raw or undercooked meat, poultry, fish or eggs?

The importance of accuracy

It is your job during a certification to make sure that all of the correct nutrition risks are assigned.

Check, check, double check!

✓ You must make sure that all measurements are taken accurately and correctly entered into the data system, so the correct risks are selected.

✓✓ You must make sure you get accurate information from the participant and select the correct response in the data system.

✓✓✓ You must use critical thinking and review what you have entered in the data system, then make any necessary corrections or assign any risks.

You have to know what is a risk and what isn't

In order to know what **a nutrition risk is**, you need to know what is **not** a nutrition risk. That means comparing what is considered "within normal limits" to what you

learn from the participant, then make a decision. You need to know a lot about nutrition and the risks in order to complete an assessment and assign a risk.

Don't worry! Your training supervisor will work with you to complete the required training on normal nutrition and nutrition risks for each category, before you can assign risks.

You will be trained to understand basic nutrition and what is "within normal limits" for every WIC participant category.

Then, during an assessment, you will ask questions to gather information from the participant.

You will use **critical thinking** to compare what you learn with the criteria for each nutrition risk.

Then, you can assign the risk in the data system.

Learning activity

Work with your training supervisor to arrange a time for you to observe another certifier completing an assessment. Use the appropriate *Job Aid: Selecting Risks* for the category of participant being certified. Make note of the way the certifier asks the assessment questions.

- What did the certifier change? Wording? Order?
- What felt comfortable or natural to you?
- What would you do differently?

Talk it over

Talk with your training supervisor about any questions you have.