

m e m o

DATE: January 19, 2022
TO: WIC Staff
FROM: State WIC Staff
SUBJECT: Probing Questions: Seventh in the Nutrition Assessment Series

In our series of memos on nutrition assessment, we have provided information and tips on various components of the assessment. This memo will focus on **probing questions to help you elicit more information** when interacting with participants!

To help identify and reinforce strengths, motivations, healthy practices, accomplishments, and developmental progress, CPAs can use probing questions. These questions are broad, open-ended questions that help start and keep the conversation going during a WIC nutrition assessment while getting more personalized information and creating more meaningful experiences for participants (*and WIC staff!*). Generally, probing questions begin with “what,” “why” or “how.” The use of phrases like “tell me,” or “can you explain further” encourage a person to expand on their response.

While the WIC nutrition assessment is a systematic process, it cannot be so rigid that it reduces the assessment to simply a series of questions or data collection points. Using probing questions helps to gain a better understanding of the participant’s desire to address concerns and move forward to plan for change.

When discussing and evaluating assessment topics (anthropometrics, biochemical, clinical, diet and nutrition, and environmental/other factors (ABCDEs) ([WIC Nutrition Assessment Tools](#))), here is an example of probing further into diet/nutrition for pregnancy and information about breastfeeding:

CPA Assessment question: Tell me what you eat in a typical day.

Example Follow Up Probing Questions:

- How many meals and snacks do you eat in a day?
- Are there any foods you avoid or dislike?
- What are some foods you eat that are related to your culture?
- Do you have safe water and refrigeration at home?

CPA Assessment question: What have you heard about breastfeeding?

Example Follow Up Probing Questions:

- What more would you like to know about breastfeeding?
- Tell me about your previous experience with breastfeeding.
- What are your mom/partner/friends telling you about how to feed your baby?

To further personalize probing questions, you can use the participant’s exact words, use their name, pause, or add a reflection. Here are some examples using **different probing techniques**:

- **Ask the participant to tell you more about what they just said.**
 - “So, Jamie, what are your plans for introducing Parker to solid foods?”

- “Sara, could you tell me more about the special diet you are on?”
- “What else have you heard about weaning from the bottle, Margie?”
- **Ask the participant to clarify what they said.**
 - “Joyce, what are your reasons for avoiding those foods?”
 - “Minnie, tell me why you are pretty sure Mickey is allergic to milk.”
- **Restate what the participant said so they know you’ve heard them. This may encourage them to say more.**
 - “So, Sally, you don’t think Patrick will eat any vegetables?”
 - “Your concern is about Ben’s allergies; what has his doctor shared with you about that?”
- **Direct the participant to explore a different but related concern.**
 - “Your main concern is about Ben’s allergies; what thoughts do you have about the way Ben is eating?”
 - “You have heard a lot about brands of formula; what have you heard about breastfeeding?”

Group Activity

At a staff meeting, have staff individually write or put in the chat box topics that have been challenging to develop probing questions for, such as healthy weight, reluctance to breastfeed, or allergies. Brainstorm and practice as a group probing questions that can help elicit more information. For example:

Assessment question: How do you feel about your weight gain during this pregnancy?

Brainstorm possible probing questions:

- What has your doctor told you about weight during pregnancy?
- How much weight did you gain with your last pregnancy? What changes do you see with this pregnancy?
- What questions do you have about your weight in pregnancy?

Follow up probing questions are necessary to elicit whether there is an internal motivation for change, there is a need for information sharing, or a referral is necessary. Use your critical thinking skills and these examples to help develop probing questions that get more information from participants on a specific subject and enhance your participant interactions! Refer to the September 15, 2021 memo, [Critical Thinking: Third in the Nutrition Assessment Series](#) for more information.

Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

[WIC Nutrition Assessment Tools](#)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/assessment/index.html>)

[Critical Thinking: Third in the Nutrition Assessment Series](#)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/wedupdate/2021/topic/0915nutassess.pdf>)

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