

HEI-related Q & As

Q. What questions does the HEI ask? Where can I find the questionnaire?

A. The HEI is a scoring metric and not a data collection tool. The question asked in dietary assessment is, "Tell me everything you had to eat and drink yesterday." That is, the HEI is best suited for dietary data collected via a 24-hour recall. We recommend the use of the National Cancer Institute's Automated Self-Administered 24-hour Recall (ASA24). It is free and available at <http://riskfactor.cancer.gov/tools/instruments/asa24/>. The ASA24 provides the variables needed to calculate HEI scores. In addition, the HEI can also be applied to any defined set of foods, such as a defined menu or market basket, to calculate a quality score.

Q. In the future, will the SuperTracker provide HEI scores?

A. The recommendations that are provided by the SuperTracker are tailored to the individual consumer's age, sex, height, weight, activity level, and pregnancy/lactation status. Because the standards used for HEI are based the least restrictive (easiest to achieve) of the USDA Food Patterns recommendations, we do not recommend using the HEI with consumers. We can, however, envision other applications of the HEI, such as menu evaluation, that could use the SuperTracker database; but no plans are in place to develop such applications at this time.

Q. Can you help me with my homework assignment, which is related to the HEI, or debug my HEI code?

A. Please visit the CNPP and NCI HEI websites (www.cnpp.usda.gov/HealthyEatingIndex.htm and riskfactor.cancer.gov/tools/hei/) where resources, including sample SAS code for the HEI-2005, are available. We are unable to provide additional technical assistance.

Q. Will you be providing sample SAS code for the HEI-2010?

A. Yes, in the near future.

Q. How can I calculate HEI-2005 scores from data that was collected using NDS-R?

A. The Pennsylvania State University Diet Assessment Center has developed a methodology to do this. Please contact Diane Mitchell (dcm1@psu.edu), who will either consult with you on how to do this yourself or do it for you.

Q. Is a MyPyramid Equivalent Database for NHANES cycles later than 2003-2004 available?

A. The USDA Agricultural Research Service is revising its guidance-based food group database so newer data are not available from them at this time. To accommodate our own needs, CNPP created an addendum to the MyPyramid Equivalent Database, version 2.0, which includes the new food codes used in NHANES 2005-2006 and 2007-2008. The addendum is available for public use at <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/OtherProjects.htm>.

Q. Is the HEI valid for use with Hispanics and other ethnic/cultural groups?

A. There is no reason to believe that the HEI is not valid for any group of people residing in the U.S. unless their diet is markedly different from the U.S. norm, such as the traditional diet of native Alaskans.

Q. Why is energy intake not part of the HEI?

A. As part of the process for developing the HEI-2005, CNPP consulted a number of experts on various topics. The energy-balance experts advised that it was not possible to estimate individual energy requirements adequately. It will be quite some time before an individual's energy requirement, energy intake, and energy expenditure can all be estimated precisely enough to be used as part of a dietary assessment tool. In the meantime, we recommend that researchers use BMI or waist circumference as an indicator of energy balance as a complement to the HEI-2010, which, like the HEI-2005, focuses on the appropriateness of the mix of foods. Furthermore, there is reason to believe that the mix of foods can influence energy intake.

Updated 2/19/13