PART I: FACTORS AFFECTING GROWTH and WEIGHT GAIN

Measuring the weight and length/standing height of WIC applicants and participants is essential to:

1. Identify malnourished women, infants, and children.
2. Identify women, infants, and children at risk for malnutrition, and in need of counseling to prevent nutrition-related health problems.
3. Reassure parents that their children are growing normally; and help reassure pregnant women that they are gaining weight at a normal rate.
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of nutrition services.
5. Monitor the health of WIC participants as a population.

Growth and development (or weight gain, for pregnant women) are influenced by several interacting factors including:

- Environmental factors (e.g., quality and quantity of dietary intake; exposure to disease)
- Behavioral factors (e.g., active vs. sedentary lifestyle, smoking and drug use)
- Genetic factors (i.e., inherited family characteristics)
- Hormonal factors (e.g., hormonal changes that are partly responsible for the "morning sickness" that many women experience early in pregnancy)

Among preschoolers, environmental factors are most likely to cause differences in growth among children of similar age and gender. Environmental factors are often related to socio-demographic characteristics, such as a family’s income and levels of education. Families with fewer resources and less education are particularly at risk for poorer nutritional status and poor growth.
QUESTIONS

Mark the following statements either true (T) or false (F):

___ 1. Measurements of weight and length/height provide valuable information for assessing the nutritional status of WIC applicants and participants.

___ 2. An individual’s growth pattern is affected by a combination of factors.

___ 3. Measurements of physical growth can be used to identify individuals who are at risk of developing nutritional problems, indicating the need for counseling that might prevent the problems.

___ 4. Measuring WIC participants is one way to evaluate the effectiveness of nutrition services.

___ 5. An individual's growth (or pattern of weight gain) is influenced by a combination of genetic, hormonal, environmental, and behavioral factors.

___ 6. Genetic factors often have a greater influence on the growth of preschool-age children, than environmental factors.

Now, check your answers against the Answer Key at the end of this module.