

COMPUTER ASSESSMENT OF DIET HISTORIES - FIBRE

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Over recent years there has been a great deal of interest in the place and amount of fibre in our diets. A recently developed computer program using food composition data from Paul and Southgate was used to estimate the fibre intakes of a group of 26 clients attending a health and fitness centre.

The clients included both men and women of varying ages. Their reasons for seeking nutritional assessment and intervention varied, but the most common requests were for:

- 1 Assistance to obtain ideal body weight
- 2 Assessment of nutrient intake

The method used to take the diet histories required estimates of the amounts of foods and the frequency of their consumption, from which an average daily nutrient intake was calculated.

The computer program analyses for the 38 nutrients, of which fibre is one, found in the Paul and Southgate tables. Their definition of fibre (previously called unavailable carbohydrates) is:

"Dietary Fibre is defined as the sum of the polysaccharides and lignin which are not digested by the endogenous secretions of the human gastro-intestinal tract."

The program currently has 186 foods on file. Because not all the Paul and Southgate foods are used, the use of the program requires judgement in at least two areas:

- 1 On entry of data it is necessary to determine the closest relevant figures when no information is provided in the tables.
- 2 In using a small amount of foods, it is necessary to find the closest figure amongst those on line.

Computers are used to achieve speed and convenience in calculations and it is likely that only a limited number of foods and codes will be preferred by an individual user.

Intakes of fibre between 5 and 10g per day were associated with qualitatively low residue diet, while fibre intakes around 30g per day were associated with diets which would be called high residue. The mean fibre intake was 19.2g. Very large intakes of natural bran were not common although there was a high level of awareness within this group of the importance of fibre in the diet.

However, from diet histories taken outside this group, it appears that high bran intakes used to treat gastro-intestinal tract disorders will, together with other good sources of fibre, provide fibre intakes of 50-60g per day.

PAUL, A. and SOUTHGATE, D.A.T. : 1979 "McCance and Widdowson's Food Composition tables" ed. (H.M.S.O. London).