

NUTRIENTS AT RISK IN THE DIET OF DEPENDENT AND
INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONALISED ELDERLY

N.H. NGUYEN,* D.M. FLINT,* D.M. PRINSLEY,* and M.L. WAHLQVIST**

It is known that malnutrition frequently occurs amongst the elderly and particularly in those who are institutionalised. Mealtime environment and nursing support given at the time of the meal are important and together can determine the amount of food eaten by the patient. Within the institution there are elderly subjects who apparently are able to feed themselves and those who receive supervision and assistance from the nursing staff.

In an attempt to identify the problems which may exist in these two groups of institutionalised elderly, the food intakes of 18 dependent and 20 independent long-term-care geriatric subjects were measured for 3 consecutive days. Nutrient intakes were assessed by computer, using the food composition tables of Paul and Southgate (1978). The mean energy and nutrients-at-risk intakes for both groups are summarised below.

Energy and nutrients in the daily diets of independent and
dependent elderly (Means \pm SEM; ranges in parentheses)

Nutrients	Independent group (n = 20)	Dependent group (n = 18)
Energy (kJ)	4926 \pm 201 (3209 - 6244)	6406 \pm 654* (1651 - 9605)
Vitamin D (μ g)	2.7 \pm 0.1 (1.1 - 3.9)	2.0 \pm 0.6 (0.1 - 12.6)
Vitamin C (mg)	24.7 \pm 4.9 (6.7 - 112.5)	27.1 \pm 3.9 (10.7 - 75.1)
Total folacin (μ g)	82.5 \pm 4.3 (39.6 - 117.2)	116.4 \pm 12.3 ** (31.5 - 217.5)
Zinc (mg)	6.3 \pm 0.4 (2.8 - 9.6)	7.3 \pm 0.9 (1.3 - 15.4)
Dietary fibre (g)	7.9 \pm 0.7 (2.7 - 14.2)	15.3 \pm 1.8 *** (2.6 - 32.5)

***P<0.001, **P<0.02 and *P<0.05

These results indicate that institutionalised elderly subjects who are supervised at mealtimes consume a more adequate diet than those who are able to feed themselves.

PAUL A.A. and SOUTHGATE D.A.T. (1978). 'McCance and Widdowson's The Composition of Foods' (HMSO: London)

*National Research Institute for Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine, Parkville, Victoria 3052

**Department of Human Nutrition, Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria 3217