

## ADULTS' BELIEFS ABOUT THE DETERMINANTS OF SUCCESSFUL DIETARY CHANGE

J. McCONAGHY

Many developed countries, including Australia, have in recent years, developed and implemented health promotional programs designed to reduce the incidence of diseases associated with overnutrition, such as heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and some cancers. One important aspect of successful intervention but one which is often ignored is an assessment of the knowledge base and interests of the target population to which the intervention is to be directed (Crawford et al. 1987).

The aims of this study were firstly, to assess the importance the general public attached to making changes to their diet which were in line with the Australian Dietary Guidelines and to ascertain whether respondents were actually making changes to their diet which corresponded with these guidelines. Secondly, the study sought to identify those factors which the general public perceived to be important in making and maintaining a dietary change. Finally, the type of information the general public saw as important to include in a nutrition and dietary change program was ascertained.

A random sample of 1,000 residents of both the Adelaide metropolitan area and SA Country areas were sent a questionnaire via the post in late 1987. The response rate was 70.0%, with a slightly higher rate of response from women compared to men.

The majority of respondents (77%) claimed they were making changes to their diet, and most of them indicated they were making changes which are in line with the Australian Dietary Guidelines, such as reducing fat, salt and sugar, and increasing fibre.

Most respondents (79.3%) also indicated that being sick with a serious illness and thinking a change of diet would aid recovery would have the strongest effect on them changing their diet. 61.5% of respondents also indicated that advice from their doctor recommending a change of diet would have a strong effect on whether or not they changed their diet. Conversely, less than 10% of respondents indicated speaking to a family member or friend, or information from the media would have a strong effect on them changing their diet.

Finally, when asked what type of information should be included in a nutrition and dietary change program, 81.1% of respondents indicated it was very important to include information about the links between various diseases (ie heart disease) and diet.

These results suggest that a large percentage of the general population are making changes to their diet, and many of those doing so are making changes which are in line with the Dietary Guidelines. In addition, it appears that there is strong interest in the population in knowing more about the links between diet and disease, and that this knowledge would have a strong effect on whether or not they changed their diet. However, few people appear to believe that the media or family members and friends can have a strong effect on dietary change.

CRAWFORD, D., WORSLEY, A. and SYRETTE, J. (1987). *J. Food Nutr.* 44: 36.

---

CSIRO Division of Human Nutrition, Adelaide, South Australia 5000