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ASSESSMENT OF NUTRITIONAL INTAKE OF MEALS ON WHEELS RECIPIENTS

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In Australia the nutritional status of the elderly has not been extensively studied. Pargeter et al 1986 have reported on low calcium,zinc and energy from Meals on Wheels (MOW)meals. This study was designed to collect nutritional data on MOW recipients.

Thirty meals on wheels recipients in a high socioeconomic status suburb of Brisbane (as indicated by Australian Bureau of Statistics data) were contacted through the MOW service. After making contact and establishing confidence with the recipients they were visited three times to obtain information on their dietary intake on two weekdays and one weekend day using a dietary record and checklist. Details of the MOW meal were obtained independently from the service. At a later time recipients were asked to provide information on the amount of the MOW meal they usually ate. Dietary data were analysed using Diet/1 version 2.0 (Xyris software) based on the Composition of Australian Foods (Dept of Community Services and Health 1989).

Selected total nutrient and energy intakes are shown in the following table (means±sd). These data assume all MOW food is eaten.

Nutrient		Weekday	Weekend
Energy (kJ)	M	8533±2415	6971±1710*
	F	6998±1076	6631±2156
Calcium (mg)	M	818±358	623±331*
	F	829±258	698±300
Zinc (mg)	M	9.1±3.0	9.7±6.7
	F	8.4±1.2	8.2±2.8

M = males ,n = 12 : F = females,n = 13.
*,P<0.05.

There are however a wide range of intakes for all nutrients with 10 - 33% of recipients having intakes below 2/3 of the relevant recommended daily intake particularly on weekend days. Intakes were independent of whether the recipients lived alone or were able to shop for themselves.

Independently the recipients were questioned on their consumption of MOW meals where it was estimated 85% of recipients consumed all the soup, 66% all meat, 71% all starchy vegetables, 75% all green and yellow vegetables, 80% all the dessert and 100% all juice.

Total dietary intake of this group of recipients was generally adequate if all of the MOW meal was consumed whereas a significant number fell below recommended intakes when this was not the case. It is recommended that MOW services introduce a scheme whereby they assess the acceptability of the meals they are providing so recipients gain maximum nutritional benefit.

PARGETER,K.A.,BRIGGS,D.R.,Lo,C.S. and WOOD-BRADLEY,R.L. (1986).Meals on Wheels: A Nutritional Evaluation. Occasional Paper in Gerontology.No.13.

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