

Meal patterns in Japanese and Australian men*K Yasuda¹, CW Binns¹, M Ouchi²*¹ School of Public Health, Curtin University of Technology, WA, 6845² Faculty of Engineering, Himeji Institute of Technology, Hyogo, Japan

There are important national differences in the nutritional status, eating habits and lifestyles which influence disease and life outcomes. These differences may be studied by comparative studies between countries or on migrant groups. Both types of studies contribute to our overall knowledge of nutrition. Secular trends are also important in nutrition ecological studies as the food supply and nutrition habits are in a constant state of change as food supply, economic conditions and nutrition knowledge change. Australia and Japan are now recognised as having the two highest disability adjusted life expectancies (DALES) in the world. In both Japan and Australia nutrition and other lifestyle factors have an important role in morbidity and mortality, yet lifestyles and disease patterns are quite different. Exploring the similarities and differences between the two countries may assist in understanding the difference in disease patterns. Given the rapid change in nutrition and eating patterns in recent years it was hypothesised that there would be more affinity in eating habits between age groups than between countries.

Methodology: A study was undertaken of the eating habits of male university students and their fathers living in Perth and in Himeji, a Japanese city with close links to Perth. Where for logistic reasons the father could not be interviewed an adult male was substituted, selected at random from the same locality. The sample consisted of a total of 811 men; 211 Australian students, 202 Japanese students, 203 Australian fathers and 188 Japanese fathers. All of the Japanese students were in the 18-24 year age group, while 12% of Australian students were older. The median age for Australian fathers was 50.5 and for Japanese fathers was 51.5 years. The entire Japanese sample had been born in Japan, compared to 85% and 54% of Australian students and fathers born in Australia. Each person was asked to complete a food frequency and a detailed lifestyle questionnaire.

Results: Australians considered themselves to be healthier than the Japanese, and for both countries the students considered themselves healthier than their fathers. In both countries about 80% ate breakfast regularly, but Japanese students were the group least likely, and Japanese fathers were the group most likely, to eat breakfast. There was no difference in the proportion of respondents who ate their evening meal at home, although the proportion who watched television while eating was twice as high in both Japanese groups. There were significant differences in food habits relating to eating fat between the groups. Australians were more likely to use olive and canola oil, while Japanese used more soy and corn oil.

Discussion: Overall the differences in eating habits differed more between countries than they did between generations. Further health gains will require health and nutrition promotion programs based on detailed knowledge of lifestyles. Comparative studies can provide useful information as a basis of these programs.