

Concurrent Session 9: Public Health Nutrition

An index of diet and eating patterns for a healthy lifestyle

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Background – Diet indices reflecting recommended or optimal eating patterns have been suggested as a method for describing dietary patterns however there is little published work on indices relevant to the Australian context.

Objective – The objective of this study was to develop and evaluate a food-based dietary index to reflect adherence to the Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults and the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating for use in epidemiology.

Design – Analysis was conducted of data collected in the 1995 National Nutrition Survey on participants aged >19 years who completed a 108 item food frequency questionnaire (n=8332). The dietary index consisted of fifteen items reflecting the dietary guidelines including intake of vegetables and legumes, fruit, total cereals, meat and alternatives, total dairy, fluids, sodium, saturated fat, alcoholic beverages, sugars and “extra” foods (as defined by the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating). Diet quality was incorporated by inclusion of items relating to wholegrain cereals, lean meat, reduced/low fat dairy and dietary variety. Mean dietary index scores were calculated across socio-demographic factors and mean nutrient intakes from 24-hour recalls were calculated across quintiles of dietary index score.

Outcomes – Significant differences were found in mean dietary index scores according to sex, age, income and area-level index of relative socio-economic disadvantage with higher scores shown amongst women, older people, those with higher incomes and those living in the least socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Higher dietary index scores were associated with lower intakes of energy, total fat and saturated fat and higher intakes of fibre, b-carotene equivalents, vitamin C, folate, calcium and iron (p<0.05).

Conclusion – This dietary index based on the recommendations for healthy eating in Australia is able to discriminate across a variety of socio-economic factors and reflects intakes of key nutrients. Further work is required to determine whether this index is useful in predicting health outcomes.

Nutrition, health and related claims on Australian foods

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Background – Legislation for regulating nutrition, health and related claims on foods in Australia and New Zealand is currently under review. It has been proposed that in future, all claims be regulated through the Food Standards Code (1), as the current co-regulatory system comprising the Food Standards Code and Code of Practice on Nutrient Claims (2) is not fully enforceable, and may inadvertently lead to consumer deception.

Objective – To determine a) the number of Australian foods currently carrying nutrition, health and related claims, and; b) of those that do, the proportion that meet the current provisions in the Food Standards Code and Code of Practice on Nutrient Claims (the co-regulatory system).

Design – A comprehensive survey of the labels of 4,171 foods in a large suburban supermarket in central Sydney, NSW between August and September, 2005. All food label information was entered into a custom-built, MS Access database for collation and statistical analysis.

Outcomes – A total of 2,611 (62.6 %) foods carried some kind of nutrition, health or related claim. Of these, 872 (33.3 %) foods carried a claim that did not comply with the co-regulatory system. The most common reason for a breach was failure to list the total fat content in the nutrition information panel (47.1%). Of the products that did not make any nutrition, health or related claims, only 296 (7.1%) breached the co-regulatory system.

Conclusion – A large proportion of foods currently making nutrition, health or related claims are in breach of either the current Food Standards Code or Code of Practice. As such, our data provide support for the placement of all nutrition, health and related claims in the Food Standards Code and the abolition of the current co-regulatory system. This will provide much stronger protection for consumers in Australia and New Zealand.

References

- 1 Australia New Zealand Food Authority. Food Standards Codes – Volume 2. Canberra: Information Australia, 2000.
- 2 National Food Authority. Code of Practice. Nutrient claims in food labels and in advertisements. Canberra: National Food Authority, 1995.