

FROM FOOD TO NUTRIENTS AND BACK

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Patterns of food choice are complex and difficult to describe without grouping data in terms of either nutrients or foods. Nutrient description of food intake is much more common probably because it has the advantage of making data comparable with reference criteria such as RDI's and it facilitates comparison between studies. However similar nutrient intakes can arise from a variety of food combinations and this information is lost in nutrient descriptions. Moreover, people choose foods and not nutrients and it is food choice information which is of most use in nutrition education and social nutrition where the focus is on food behaviour. This point is well illustrated by weighed food intake data which we have recently collected from 28 sole parents in Geelong.

There were no differences of statistical significance in the median nutrient density of the diet between the study parents and a national sample of women aged 25-34 years (Comm. Dept of Health 1986). However a comparison of intake in terms of food groups did show differences. The largest difference was a 10% lower intake of fruit which was made up by higher intakes of cereal products, vegetables and meat products. A closer look at these food groups revealed primarily a lower intake of citrus fruits and a higher intake of "cereal-added" meats such as pies and crumbed meats.

The available nutrient data on diet and low socioeconomic status do little to illuminate the impact of low incomes on food choice. The use of food as well as nutrient descriptions of the dietary data can redirect attention to real differences in food behaviour between more and less affluent Australians, and give clues to the adaptations low income families make in planning meals in constrained circumstances.

FOOD GROUP	FILIF *		NDSA **	
	g/day	% of total	g/day	% of total
FOODS				
Cereals & cereal products	162	27	214	24
Vegetables	141	23	183	20
Fruit	88	15	230	25
Meat & meat products	115	19	157	17
Meat alternatives	26	4	41	5
Milk products	37	6	41	5
Fats	9	1	12	1
Sugar, jams, honey & syrups	15	3	17	2
Snack foods	9	1	10	1
Total all foods	602	99	905	100
BEVERAGES				
Non alcoholic	653	80	1051	82
Milk	159	20	233	18
Total all beverages	812	100	1284	100

* Food in Low Income Families

**National Dietary Survey of Adults 1983

COMMONWEALTH DEPT OF HEALTH.(1986). National dietary survey of adults 1983, No 1 - Foods consumed. Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.