

HIGH SUGAR INTAKE IN A GROUP OF WOMEN ON METHADONE MAINTENANCE

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Nutritional assessment comprising dietary and anthropometric measurements, was conducted in a group of opioid-dependent women attending a methadone maintenance program in South Western Sydney. Of the 114 female clients enrolled in the clinic, 98 were available to participate. Data was collected over five months during routine medical interviews at the clinic. Mean age of the sample was 29.8 (range 18 - 46) years and mean and body mass index was 22.7 (range 16.2 - 43.4) kg/m². Mean methadone dose was 57 (range 10 - 100) mg and the mean number of months on the program was 29.2 (range 2 - 66) months. The majority of the sample (96%) had left school before gaining the Higher School Certificate, more than half (56%) lived in public housing, and 90% obtained Social Security benefits as their official means of support. Dietary data was obtained by two 24 hour recall interviews over weekdays and weekends (14% Sundays, 24% Mondays, 25% Tuesdays, 20% Wednesdays, 17% Thursdays), using a standardised interview format and display of familiar household measures to help visualise and quantify portion sizes. Nutrient intake was analysed using the NUTTAB data base of Australian foods (1992). Of the 98 women who commenced the study, 12 were excluded from the statistical analysis for the following reasons: transfer to another program (n=5), sickness (n=1), repeated failure to keep appointment (n=3), or refusal (n=3). The Table shows intake of energy and macronutrients in the remaining methadone group (n=86) compared to women of similar age in the National Dietary Survey (English et al. 1987).

	MACRONUTRIENT INTAKE ^a		PERCENTAGE OF ENERGY	
	Methadone group	NDS ^b	Methadone group	NDS ^b
Energy (MJ)	6.48 ± 0.23	8.04 ± 0.15	-	-
Protein	53 ± 2	80 ± 2	14%	17%
Fat	60 ± 3	83 ± 2	35%	37%
Carbohydrate	191 ± 7	209 ± 4	48%	42%
sugars	122 ± 5	101 ± 3	30%	20%
starch	69 ± 4	109 ± 2	18%	23%
Dietary fibre	11 ± 1	19 ± 1	-	-
Alcohol	8 ± 3	9 ± 1	3%	3%

^amean ± SEM (g); ^b data from National Dietary Survey for Australian women aged 25 - 34 years

The diet of women on methadone maintenance was characterised by low energy intake with a higher percentage derived from sugars, and a low intake of dietary fibre. Sugars were mainly consumed as white table sugar added to beverages or sprinkled over food items, cordial drinks and carbonated soft drinks; cakes, biscuits and ice-creams were also important sources; intake of sugar from fruits was low. This eating pattern may contribute to the high prevalence of dental caries and chronic constipation observed in the group. The results also support anecdotal evidence of a craving for sweetness described by addicts. Despite the low energy intake, body mass indices of the group was no different to the normal population. It is possible that two days intake was insufficient to measure accustomed diet accurately in this group of women. Alternatively the low intake may be a consequence of their largely sedentary lifestyle, or the drug treatment itself may have reduced energy requirements.

ENGLISH R., CASHEL K., BENNETT S., BERZINS J., WATERS A. and MAGNUS P. (1987). National Dietary Survey of Adults: 1983. (Australian Government Publishing Service: Canberra)

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