

Summary Statement of the International Expert Meeting: Health Significance of Fat Quality of the Diet

Barcelona, Spain, February 1–2, 2009

Connie Diekman Ibrahim Elmadfa Bert Koletzko Pekka Puska Ricardo Uauy
Hans Zevenbergen

Dietary Recommendations

- The goal of dietary recommendations is to meet nutritional needs and at the same time prevent development of chronic disease and support optimal health and well-being.
- The quantity of fat is an important factor determining energy intake, which should be balanced with energy expenditure, to achieve and maintain healthy weight.
- The quality of fat in the diet is important for normal growth and development, and it has a marked impact on blood cholesterol and the occurrence of coronary heart disease and stroke.
- In line with authoritative international health bodies and current evidence, the following recommendations on the quality of fat in the diet are made for optimal health across the life course worldwide, from an age of about 2 years onwards:
 - Fat may provide up to 30–35% of the daily energy intake;
 - Saturated fat should provide no more than 10% of the daily energy intake;
 - Essential polyunsaturated (omega-6 and omega-3) fats should contribute 6–10% of the daily energy intake;

- The intake of trans fats should be less than 1% of the daily energy intake;
- The remainder of the energy from fat can be provided by monounsaturated fats.

Foods

- On a global level, the main sources of saturated fats are fatty dairy products (like butter, ghee, whole milk, cream and fatty cheeses), fatty meats, animal fats (such as lard) and the vegetable fats palm, palm kernel and coconut oil and fatty snacks (e.g. cakes, pastries and fries).
- The main modifiable sources of trans fats are partially hydrogenated oils. Beef, pork, lamb, butter, milk and other milk products have naturally occurring trans fats.
- Important sources of unsaturated fats are: vegetable oils such as soybean oil, rapeseed (canola) oil, sunflower oil, olive oil, fatty fish, fish oil, nuts, seeds and products made from these, e.g. soft margarines and mayonnaise and derived products.
- Many food manufacturers have significantly reduced the content of saturated and trans fats in foods. Efforts

to further decrease the saturated and trans fat contents in products are needed, where appropriate with a concomitant increase in the proportion of unsaturated fats.

- Substantial benefits can be achieved when simple dietary changes are made like exchanging full-fat dairy products with low-fat choices, fatty meats with lean meats and fish, and the use of vegetable rather than saturated animal fats in food preparation and food products. This will improve the fat composition of the diet and can contribute significantly to reducing the population risk of cardiovascular disease.

Consumer Knowledge and Behavior

- People are generally not aware of the importance of the fat quality of the diet and the sources of different fats. The general focus is on quantity of fat to control weight. Both are reflected in patterns of consumption for most people, which are not in line with current recommendations for optimal health. Dietary surveys indicate that many populations around the world (both in developed and developing countries) consume excess saturated and trans fats and a low proportion of essential polyunsaturated fats.

Call to Action

- People should be advised how to decrease their saturated fat intake and increase the proportion of unsaturated and essential polyunsaturated fats and oils in a practical, sustainable and actionable way in order to be healthy today and tomorrow.
- One of the most effective options is the provision of concrete examples of replacing foods in a diet generally high in saturated and trans fats (e.g. butter, fatty cheeses, fatty meats, products fried in unhealthy fats) with products with lower content of saturated and trans fats, and preferably use of foods high in unsaturated and essential polyunsaturated fats (e.g. sunflower oil, soybean oil, rapeseed oil, olive oil and products made from these such as soft margarines and mayonnaise).

- An additional option is to provide people with important information on the content of food products on pack in a clear, usable, understandable way, including energy content per portion size and fat quality.
- Use simple language when communicating with the public, e.g. good/healthy fats and bad/unhealthy fats, and use consistent, scientific and coherent language when communicating with health experts.
- The food and food service industry should collaborate with health and nutrition experts to ensure appropriate messaging based on current recommendations, to eliminate trans fats, reduce saturated fats and provide accurate information to enable people to make healthier choices.
- Nutrition and health experts should provide consistent evidence-based information supporting public health goals and become nutrition communicators. They also should continue to seek collaboration with the food industry, governments and non-governmental organizations.
- Health care professionals should take responsibility for ensuring that patients receive the right information and support on current dietary recommendations. They should provide their patients with advice on the selection of dietary fats as they do on other preventive actions and if necessary, seek training to be able to provide proper advice or to refer them to nutrition specialists.
- The International Expert Meeting calls on scientists, health care professionals, governments, the food industry, health authorities and media around the world to advocate consistent, simple and effective messages to improve the fat quality of the diet of people everywhere and promote such changes for the prevention of chronic disease and to achieve optimal health.

Disclosure Statement

As a steering Committee member for the International Expert meeting, C.D. received compensation from Unilever through an unrestricted educational grant. C.D.'s section of the paper was written without a conflict of interest.