



RESEARCH NEWS

“Corrupt” dietary guidelines must be rewritten to tackle obesity and diabetes, report warns

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A “complete overhaul” of dietary advice is needed because current public health recommendations have been influenced by the food industry and are actually fuelling obesity and type 2 diabetes rather than reducing them, a hard hitting report has warned.¹

The roots of obesity and type 2 diabetes are firmly embedded in diet—specifically, the “low fat” and “lower cholesterol” messages, said the report by the National Obesity Forum and the Public Health Collaboration.

It said that the flawed science behind those messages and dietary goals, subsequently “corrupted by commercial influences” of food companies, have resulted in increased consumption of low fat “junk” food, refined carbohydrates, and polyunsaturated vegetable oils.

“The conspicuous rise in obesity immediately following the introduction of these national guidelines suggests that they have been a root cause of the problem,” said the report, citing the latest “Eatwell” recommendations from Public Health England as “the latest example of commercial interests trumping independent scientific evidence.”

But the report asserted that “the real scandal” is that “academics, institutions and journals whose primary responsibility is to patients have at times colluded with industry for financial gain,” at great expense to public health.

The authors called for “a complete overhaul” of existing dietary advice, to include recommendations based on the most up to date evidence. They cited evidence that eating fat does not make people fat but that snacking does; that saturated fat does not cause heart disease; that processed foods labelled as “low fat,” “lite,” “low cholesterol,” or “proven to lower cholesterol” should be avoided, along with industrial vegetable oils; that starchy and refined carbohydrates should be limited to prevent and reverse type 2 diabetes; and that the optimal sugar consumption for health is zero.

The report highlighted how current dietary guidance is at odds with the evidence: for example, refined and starchy carbohydrates increase blood glucose levels, body weight, and the need for drugs to manage diabetes.

Meanwhile, current nutritional guidelines “erroneously focus on total fat and saturated fat content rather than specific food sources and the fatty acid subtypes,” the report said. “The most natural and nutritious foods available—meat, fish, eggs, dairy products, nuts, seeds, olives, avocados—all contain saturated fat. These natural foods have formed part of the human diet

since Paleolithic times and have been eaten . . . without adverse health consequences for millennia.

“The continued demonization of omnipresent natural fat drives people away from highly nourishing, wholesome, and health promoting foods.”

The authors warned that a bad diet cannot be fixed by increasing exercise because obesity is “a hormonal disorder leading to abnormal energy partitioning” and that counting calories is not the solution for weight loss because calories from different foods can have entirely different effects.

“It is highly irrelevant how many calories a portion of food on a plate contains. What matters is how our body responds to the ingestion and absorption of those calories, and how they are metabolised,” the report explained. “For example, equal calorie portions of sugar, alcohol, meat or olive oil have widely differing effects on hormonal systems such as insulin, and [on] satiety signals such as [cholecystokinin] or peptide YY.”

As a result, public health messages should not focus on calories, the authors argued, but should encourage the consumption of whole foods that help protect against obesity-promoting energy imbalance and metabolic dysfunction.

Commenting on the report, Suzanne Dickson, professor of neuroendocrinology at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, said that the authors’ recommendations were misleading, did not promote health, and were not in line with advice from the World Health Organization.

“While it may be good to reduce intake of carbohydrates and sugars, there remains a great body of evidence that it is equally important to limit intake of fats,” she said. “I am not aware of any evidence that common obesity is due to under- or over-production of any hormone. I am not aware of any hard evidence that snacking causes obesity.”

She added, “It is misleading to suggest that the amount of calories on a plate is ‘irrelevant.’ Diets fail because food restriction of any kind leads to reduced metabolism coupled with food cravings that eventually overpower restraint.”



- 1 National Obesity Forum, Public Health Collaboration. Eat fat, cut the carbs and avoid snacking to reverse obesity and type 2 diabetes. 23 May 2016. www.nationalobesityforum.org.uk.

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