

Adapted Summary Statement of the International Expert Meeting¹
Health Significance of Fat Quality of the Diet
Cape Town, South Africa, March 3, 2009

Dietary Goals

- The purpose of dietary goals is to specify quantities of nutrients that meet nutritional needs and at the same time prevent development of chronic disease and support optimal health and well-being. These goals should be achievable from the national food supply. National studies have indicated that both under- and overnutrition is a problem in South Africa.
- Total energy intake should be balanced between energy intake and expenditure, to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight. The quantity of fat in the daily eating plan is an important factor contributing to total energy intake.
- The quality of fat in the diet is important; some fats have a positive impact on normal growth and development, brain function, and others may influence blood cholesterol levels negatively and could thus contribute to the development of coronary heart disease and stroke.
- In line with authoritative international health bodies and current evidence, the following recommendations on the quantity (total amount) and quality (type) of fat in the diet are made for optimal health across the life span, from an age of about two years onwards:
 - Fat may provide up to 30% of the daily energy intake. The total amount of energy provided should be balanced between energy intake and energy expenditure. Saturated fat should provide no more than 10% of the daily energy intake and in those at risk of cardiovascular disease the intake should be less than 7% of energy;
 - Polyunsaturated fats, including essential fats, should contribute 6-10 % of the daily energy intake with omega-6 providing 5-8% of energy and omega-3 1-2% of daily energy;
 - The remainder of the energy from fat will be provided by mono-unsaturated fats;
 - The intake of trans fats should be less than 1% of the daily energy intake.

Foods that commonly supply fats in the eating patterns of South Africans

- The main sources of saturated fats are animal fats (such as the visible fat on meat, lard and dairy cream) and vegetable fats from palm oil, palm kernel oil and coconut oil and food products that have these vegetable fats as an ingredient, e.g. non-dairy creamers.
- The main sources of industrially produced trans fats are products that have partially hydrogenated oils as an ingredient. Beef, lamb, butter, milk and other milk products have small amounts of naturally occurring trans fats.
- Important sources of polyunsaturated and/or monounsaturated fats are: vegetable oils such as sunflower oil, canola oil, olive oil, soybean oil; products made from these, e.g. soft margarines, mayonnaise, salad dressings; fatty fish (e.g. pilchards, salmon, mackerel), fish oil, avocados, olives, nuts and vegetable seeds.
- Many food manufacturers and food service industries have significantly reduced the total content of fat, and the content of saturated and trans fats in foods. Efforts to further decrease the saturated and trans fat contents in products and in food preparation 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;
 - Exchanging full fat dairy products with low fat choices
 - Exchanging fatty meats with lean meat and chicken without the skin,
 - Using vegetable oil rather than saturated animal fats or partially hydrogenated vegetable oils/fats in food preparation and food products.
 - Fish is a good source of the omega-3 fats and should be included regularly in the diet.
- Making these changes will improve the fat composition of the diet and can contribute significantly to reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Consumer Knowledge and Behaviour

- People generally are 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 and decrease risk of cardiovascular disease. 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

- Health professionals should advise people how to decrease saturated fat and trans fat intake and balance the proportion of monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acid intake 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 specific examples of replacing foods in a diet generally high in saturated (e.g. butter, high fat cheeses, fatty meats) and trans fats (e.g. products fried in or prepared with trans fat containing oils/fats) with products with lower content of saturated and no trans fats, and preferably use of foods high in unsaturated and essential polyunsaturated fats (e.g. sunflower oil, soybean oil, canola oil, olive oil and products made from these such as soft margarines and mayonnaise). Another important strategy is to educate the consumer on healthy cooking methods. In addition, consumers must be given information on the content of food products on food labels in a clear, usable, understandable way, in the form of a mandatory nutrition label. Education on how to use this information must also be given.
- Use simple language when communicating with the public, e.g. more healthy fats and less healthy 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 industrially produced trans fats, reduce saturated fats and provide accurate information to enable people to make healthier choices.
- Nutrition and health experts should become nutrition communicators that provide consistent evidence-based information supporting public health goals. They also should

continue to seek collaboration with the food industry, governments and non-governmental organisations.

- Health care professionals should take responsibility for ensuring that patients receive the right information and support on implementing dietary guidelines as part of their healthy lifestyle. They should provide their patients with advice on 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 and National Expert Meetings, under the auspices of the IUNS (International Union of Nutritional Sciences), calls on scientists, health care professionals, governments, 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 to promote such changes for the prevention of chronic disease and to achieve optimal health.
- Partners and stakeholders in South Africa should include the government (Directorates of Nutrition, Food Control, Maternal and Child Health, Oral health, Health promotion, Chronic diseases; Departments of Education, Agriculture and Trade and Industry); food industry; health professionals; consumers (representative of consumer organisations); media, nutrition departments at institutes of higher education, relevant NGO's and nutrition related professional organisations i.e. Nutrition Society of South Africa (NSSA), Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA), South African Association for Food Science and Technology (SAAFoST), South African Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (SASPEN).