



Nutrition for Family Living

Susan Nitzke, Nutrition Specialist; susan.nitzke@ces.uwex.edu
Sherry Tanumihardjo, Nutrition Specialist; sherry.tan@ces.uwex.edu
Beverly Phillips, Outreach Specialist; beverly.phillips@ces.uwex.edu
Amy Rettammel, Outreach Specialist; arettamm@facstaff.wisc.edu

February, 2000 Topics

Reported Adoption of Dietary Fat and Fiber Recommendations among Consumers
Credibility of Nutrition-related Research as Reported in Newspapers
Accuracy of Nutrition Information Reported in Popular Magazines
How Nutrition Affects Cognition videoconference, 4/27/00

Reported Adoption of Dietary Fat and Fiber Recommendations among Consumers

In a recent article appearing in the January 2000 issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, researchers (one of whom is Susan Nitzke) report that even among consumers who say they'll make a dietary change if it's good for their health, actually making that change is another matter.

The researchers surveyed 2,682 adults from 12 states and asked them, "If it were good for your health, would you:"

- Drink 1% or skim milk
- Take skin off poultry
- Trim fat from meat
- Eat whole-grain breads
- Eat more fruits and vegetables

The first three questions were designed to look at behaviors related to fat intake. The last two questions focused on behaviors related to fiber intake.

Then researchers asked participants questions related to the frequency with which they actually follow these behaviors. Among those who said they *would* follow a particular behavior if it's good for their health, here are the percentages of participants who said they *actually were* practicing the behavior:

- 72% were drinking 1% or skim milk
- 69% were taking skin off poultry
- 74% were trimming fat from meat
- 64% were using whole-grain breads
- 15% were eating plenty of fruits and vegetables

In general, participants with the following characteristics were more likely to report following a specific behavior: females, older participants, those with more education, those who were white, participants with no children younger than 18 in the house, those who rated their own health as excellent, those who considered health a primary influence on their diet, and participants who did *not* consider "lack of available time" to be a primary influence on their diet.

What does this mean?

Participants in this study reported engaging in fat-reducing behaviors more often than fiber-increasing behaviors, and eating more fruits and vegetables was the least-reported behavior of all. Based on these results and the characterization of those participants who *did* report following behaviors, nutrition education messages should continue to emphasize ways to increase fruit and vegetable consumption, particularly among families that include young children. See the July 1999 issue of *Nutrition for Family Living* for additional information about factors that influence fruit and vegetable consumption.



Credibility of Nutrition-related Research as Reported in Newspapers

Nearly one in five Americans lists newspapers as one of their primary sources of nutrition information¹. It is to the advantage of nutrition educators to be familiar with the quality of nutrition information that is reported in newspapers.

An examination of newspapers' ability to accurately report nutrition information was recently published². Researchers looked at five major American newspapers published in 1995 (*NY Times*, *Seattle Times*, *LA Times*, *USA Today*, and *Wall Street Journal*), and examined a total of 148 nutrition-related articles. These articles reported on a total of 102 different studies, over half of which came from just five scientific journals (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, *Science*, and *American Journal of Cardiology*).

Of the 148 newspaper reports examined:

- 92% gave at least one study author's name
- 84% gave the title of the journal where the original research was published
- 78% reported study results correctly
- 68% reported the study sample size correctly
- 51% included a description of the variables measured in the study
- 43% described the study population accurately
- 23% reported study limitations

What does this mean?

First the bad news: newspapers don't do a good job of consistently providing enough information to interpret a research study for consumers. Without being able to: 1) read exactly what variables were measured in a study; 2) trust the description of the population that was studied; or 3) see what the study authors describe as limitations to their own research (and decide what you think are limitations), it's difficult to make heads or tails of a study.

Here's the good news: It's a pretty good bet (3 out of 4) that the results of a study as reported in the newspaper are correct. It's in the interpretation of the results that nutrition educators play an important role. In the large majority of the newspaper reports examined, study author(s) were named and the journal source of the information was given. This makes it much easier for educators to track that information that is missing from the newspaper report.

¹American Dietetic Association's nationwide public opinion survey, *Nutrition and You: Trends 2000*. A summary of the report is available at <http://www.eatright.org/pr/2000/010300a.html>.

²Hackman EM, Moe GL. Evaluation of newspaper reports of nutrition-related research. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 99 (12): 1564-66.



Nutrition for Family Living February, 2000

Accuracy of Nutrition Information Reported in Popular Magazines

Forty-seven percent of Americans look to magazines as one of their primary sources of nutrition information. This is an increase from 44% in 1997¹. How reliable is the nutrition information reported in magazines?

The American Council on Science and Health (ACSH) regularly examines nutrition reporting in popular magazines. The latest report² used four expert judges to critique 21 top-circulating magazines that regularly contain nutrition news. The judges used the following criteria: accuracy, presentation style, and validity of recommendations. Magazines were ranked by percentage points: “excellent” = 90-100%; “good” = 80-89%; “fair” = 70-79%; and “poor” = <70%.

Magazines ranking excellent/good		Magazines ranking fair/poor
<i>Consumer Reports</i> (95%)	<i>Woman's Day</i> (85%)	<i>Fitness</i> (79%)
<i>Better Homes and Gardens</i> (92%)	<i>Cooking Light</i> (85%)	<i>Mademoiselle</i> (79%)
<i>Good Housekeeping</i> (90%)	<i>McCall's</i> (83%)	<i>Self</i> (77%)
<i>Glamour</i> (89%)	<i>Redbook</i> (83%)	<i>Cosmopolitan</i> (74%)
<i>Parents</i> (88%)	<i>Runner's World</i> (82%)	<i>Muscle & Fitness</i> (70%)
<i>Health</i> (87%)	<i>Shape</i> (81%)	<i>New Woman</i> (69%)
<i>Reader's Digest</i> (86%)	<i>Men's health</i> (81%)	
<i>Prevention</i> (86%)		

According to the judges, magazines that ranked high included the following characteristics in their nutrition articles:

- Encouraged good dietary practices and avoided labeling foods “good” and “bad.”
- Made recommendations based on scientific consensus and peer-reviewed journals
- Offered practical solutions and avoided “quick fixes.”
- Cited qualified experts with recognized credentials.
- Used accepted diet guidelines.
- Avoided making recommendations designed to sell a product.

Over the past ten years, ACHS has released three reports that use the same selection and judging criteria, allowing for comparison over the years. ACHS has found that the accuracy of nutrition reporting in magazines has improved. For more detail about the magazines and how they were ranked, see the ACHS report².

What does this mean?

Magazines seem to be doing a better job at reporting nutrition information more responsibly, but there are still some popular magazines out there that need to improve. Nutrition educators can use the characteristics listed above to judge whether an article is worthwhile, and encourage consumers to check out questionable nutrition information by consulting a qualified health professional or organization.

¹American Dietetic Association's nationwide public opinion survey, *Nutrition and You: Trends 2000*. A summary of the report is available at <http://www.eatright.org/pr/2000/010300a.html>.

²Woznicki D. Nutritional Accuracy in Popular Magazines (January 1995 - December 1996). The American Council on Science and Health, New York, NY, 1998. A summary of the report is available at <http://www.acsh.org/publications/reports/nutacc95.html>, where there is also a link to download the complete report (17pp.).



Nutrition for Family Living February, 2000

How Nutrition Affects Cognition videoconference, 4/27/00

We have made arrangements with Iowa State University to allow Wisconsin county Extension offices to downlink a one-day videoconference, "How Nutrition Affects Cognition—Implications for Feeding Infants and Children," on April 27, 2000 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (with a one-hour break at 12:50). The conference will feature nationally-recognized experts exploring scientific and clinical research concerning the relationship between nutrition and cognitive development of young children. This conference is the 29th annual Current Issues in Nutrition Conference from Iowa State University. Because the topic is so closely related to current program-wide interest in brain development, we thought you would be interested in viewing the program and making it available to nutrition and education professionals in your community.

The program is carried live with time scheduled for questions from the satellite viewing audience. Participants can fax or e-mail questions to presenters. Application has been made for continuing education units for Registered Dietitians, Dietetic Technicians, Certified Family and Consumer Scientists, Registered Nurses and Physician Assistants.

The program is appropriate for nutritionists, registered dietitians, nurses, dietetic technicians, pediatricians, physician assistants, family and consumer scientists, health educators, child development specialists, school foodservice directors, and other health care and education professionals.

To register as a downlink site, please contact:

Ann Stapleton
Extended and Continuing Education, Iowa State University
102 Schenman Bldg
Ames, IA 50011-1112
Phone: 515/294-1400

Each registered downlink site will be sent a packet of handout and promotional materials several weeks before the program. Counties interested in serving as downlink sites should send their \$30 registration by March 17 to receive the site materials. Include your name, title, institution, address, phone, fax, email, whether you're paying by purchase order (#), check (payable to Iowa State Univ.), or Mastercard (name, card # and exp. date).

More information on the program itself will soon be available on the web at:

<http://www.lifelearner.iastate.edu/>

Speakers and topics are:

Richard L. Canfield, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Human Development, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY - What is Cognition and How Is It Assessed?

Susan E. A. Carlson, Ph.D., Midland Dairy Council Professor of Nutrition, Department of Dietetics and Nutrition, University of Kansas Medical Center, Kansas City - Dietary Long Chain Fatty Acids and Visual Development in Infants.

Harold H. Sandstead, M.D., Professor, Preventive Medicine and Community Health, University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, TX - Zinc, A Nutrient Essential For Development and Function of the Brain.

Maureen Black, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Pediatrics, University of Maryland School of Medicine, Baltimore, MD - Interaction of Nutrients and Environmental Stimulation.

Ronald Kleinman, M.D., Chief, Pediatric Gastrointestinal and Nutritional Unit, Massachusetts General Hospital, and Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School, Cambridge, MA - School Meals and Classroom Behavior.