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J Bruning

By email: fyi-request-27933-ad1fbc54@requests.fyi.org.nz
Ref: H2024048401

Tēnā koe J Bruning

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to the Ministry of Health – Manatū Hauora (the Ministry) on 6 August 2024 for information regarding the Ministry's Eating and Activity Guidelines (EAGs). Please find a response to each part of your request below:

In which month were the 2020 Ministry of Health guidelines published?

The EAGs for New Zealand Adults were first published in October 2015 and updated in November 2020 to include advice for pregnant and breastfeeding women. The update in 2020 only looked at pregnant and breastfeeding women and did not include review of the general advice for adults.

Did the Ministry of Health guideline authors (who cited the Hooper 2015 review) consider the May 2020 Cochrane review led by Lee Hooper, and discuss the findings that there was no effect from saturated fat intake across a wide spectrum of health conditions?

The main author of the Ministry's guidelines no longer works at the Ministry, so we are unable to confirm. However, given that the May 2020 Cochrane review occurred after the publication of the 1st edition in October 2015, and the 2020 EAG update focused on pregnant and breastfeeding women, it is unlikely that it was considered as part of the limited 2020 revision.

The findings of the May 2020 Cochrane Review (Hooper et al) are consistent with the Eating and Activity Guidelines, Eating Statement 2 (page 47) relating to saturated fat intake. The May 2020 review found that reducing dietary saturated fat reduced the risk of combined cardiovascular events, with greater reductions in saturated fat resulting in greater reductions in cardiovascular disease events. The May 2020 review also noted that for most other outcomes studied there was low or very low-quality evidence. The authors also reported no evidence of harmful effects of reducing saturated fat intakes.

Please provide all citations based on your recommendation for ages 2-18 - used to justify the claim that 'saturated fat and trans fatty acids increase total and LDL cholesterol (increasing the risk of cardiovascular disease)' which underpin the recommendation that children aged 2-18 years should lower saturated fat intake.

The Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Healthy Children and Young People (Aged 2-18 years): A background paper was originally published in July 2012. There was a partial revision in February 2015 to incorporate minor editorial changes. This paper can be found at:

www.health.govt.nz/publication/food-and-nutrition-guidelines-healthy-children-and-young-people-aged-2-18-years-background-paper.

The Ministry continues to recommend that New Zealanders lower their saturated fat intake and eat unsaturated (particularly polyunsaturated) fats instead. In practice this means, using polyunsaturated fats such as plant-based oils and spreads instead of butter if needed for cooking and spreading. The vast majority of evidence from around the world supports this advice for population health.

The updated advice in the EAGs is based on recent large international evidence reviews that were used to develop dietary guidelines for Australia, the United States and the Nordic countries. This multi-sourced evidence consistently describes a healthy eating pattern that is high in vegetables and fruit; includes whole grain cereals; low-fat milk products; legumes and nuts; fish and other seafood; and unsaturated oils. This eating pattern is low in processed meats, saturated fat, sodium (salt) and sugar-sweetened foods and drinks. The evidence shows that this way of eating is associated with a lower risk of heart disease, stroke and other health conditions.

The EAGs advice is also closely linked to evidence-based recommendations from the World Health Organization and the World Cancer Research Fund.

The link between saturated fat consumption, blood cholesterol levels and heart disease are well established, with evidence building over the past 60 years. Recent research continues to add to this evidence base. A Cochrane Collaboration review published in 2015 (Hooper et al 2015) found that reducing saturated fat intake and partially replacing it with unsaturated fats, particularly polyunsaturated fats, is linked with a decreased risk of cardiovascular disease. A follow-up Cochrane Collaboration Review (Hooper et al, 2020) also found that reducing saturated fat reduced serum cholesterol, and when saturated fat is reduced for at least two years, results in a potentially important reduction in combined cardiovascular events.

High saturated fat diets have been highlighted in the media periodically. The few recent studies that endorse high saturated fat diets are not sufficient to refute the wealth of counterevidence.

New nutrition related research continues to be published and the Ministry's monitors findings from research produced worldwide. Any new research is considered in the context of the already existing body of evidence. As part of the EAGs process, the Ministry worked closely with experts in nutrition and physical activity who provided guidance on interpreting current evidence.

Has the Ministry of Health ever reviewed the evidence that partial substitution of carbohydrate with either protein and fats can lower blood pressure, improve lipid levels, reduce estimated cardiovascular risk and reduce pre-diabetes and diabetes incidence?

The Ministry undertook a review of popular diets in 2017 including paleo and very low carbohydrate diets. The information in this review has now been transferred to Health New Zealand – Te Whatu Ora and can be found on their website at: <https://info.health.nz/keeping-healthy/popular-diets-review>.

Does the Ministry of Health plan to review this evidence?

The guidelines for children and young people are the next set of guidelines scheduled for review. The commencement of the review is on hold and subject to prioritisation and available resource being identified.

*Has the Ministry of Health reviewed evidence that current dietary guidelines relating to current recommended levels of breads and cereals in the diet may have potential to increase serum lipids and contribute to the development of pre-diabetes and diabetes?
- Pre-schoolers: at least 4 servings*

- Children: at least 5 servings
- Young people: at least 6 servings

The Ministry's current serving size advice which was updated in 2020 can be found on Health New Zealand's website at: www.tewhaturora.govt.nz/assets/Health-services-and-programmes/Nutrition/new-serving-size-advice-dec20-v3.pdf. The document outlines the process for the new serving sizes and rationale for aligning with Australia.

I trust this information fulfils your request. If you wish to discuss any aspect of your request with us, including this decision, please feel free to contact the OIA Services Team on: oiagr@health.govt.nz.

Under section 28(3) of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Manatū Hauora website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests.

Nāku noa, nā



Dr Nicholas Jones
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