

PHILIP THOMPSON - WRITTEN EVIDENCE (FDO0098)

Less carbohydrate and more protein.

In addressing the links between food, a healthy diet and tackling obesity I would like to draw the committee's attention to an apparent lacuna in the prevailing guidance and group think of the health and nutritional establishment.

Many individuals have reversed their obesity, and in some cases Type 2 diabetes, by dietary changes to reduce their intake of carbohydrate. In one published study ¹ the initial approach taken by a group of GPs in Norway was to tell their patients "You cannot eat: Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta, confectionery, fruit, dairy products, cereal products or nuts, or drink alcohol for 4 weeks. "

A British GP Dr David Unwin reports similar success and describes his frustration with 26 years of unsuccessful attempts to treat his patients based on flawed guidance ².

There are many published studies showing a low carbohydrate diet intervention to be safe and at least as effective as a low fat one, however the NHS and Public Health England are in denial.

I understand the Committee does not seek to address obesity treatment however I venture to suggest that dietary changes used to reverse obesity may also have a role to play in avoiding its onset in the first place. Eating less carbohydrate may be part of the solution you are seeking.

We should consider how terminology like "high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS)" might influence consumers or stigmatise certain foods. If one were to eat Cheddar Cheese as part of a reduced carbohydrate diet the HFSS label is unhelpful, it is a minimally processed traditional British food with a reasonable salt content and it is perfect for a reduced carbohydrate diet. Similarly beef steak or salmon fillets are clearly high in fat but are unprocessed, natural, traditional and healthy.

Government guidance on promotion of HFSS foods ³ does exclude foods like meat and fish sold whole however the messaging is problematic if one is trying to eat a healthy diet that is not based on beige carbohydrate foods.

I suggest that HFSS is not a useful categorisation when applied to foods and a diet where the fat content and indeed the salt content is not an issue.

A second aspect of food and nutrition policy is the importance of protein. So much effort goes into reducing fat and avoiding sugar that we have forgotten how important protein is. The derivation of the word even implies it is the first priority, from the Greek for "first" or "primary".

Our labelling makes it difficult to identify foods by protein content. Dr D Layman ⁴ suggests that we should have a protein intake of 30 grams in a meal in order to stimulate muscle synthesis. The front of pack labelling does not tell me the protein content, it only lists the things I should be avoiding or reducing. We need to PROMote PROtein to help build satiating meals and to reduce the sarcopenia so evident in our elderly population ^{5,6}.

I urge the committee to reflect on these issues and avoid any “collateral damage” that may steer consumers away from good sources of healthy proteins and low carbohydrate foods.

8 April 2024

References.

1. Nilsen MD, Mdala I, Werner EL
Treatment of overweight and obesity in general practice: a cluster randomised trial
BMJ Nutrition, Prevention & Health 2023;6:doi: 10.1136/bmjnph-2023-000721
2. Unwin D
Reducing overweight and obesity; so how are we doing?
BMJ Nutrition, Prevention & Health 2024;e000836. doi: 10.1136/bmjnph-2023-000836
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/restricting-promotions-of-products-high-in-fat-sugar-or-salt-by-location-and-by-volume-price/restricting-promotions-of-products-high-in-fat-sugar-or-salt-by-location-and-by-volume-price-implementation-guidance#what-food-is-in-scope>
4. Layman, Donald K et al. Defining meal requirements for protein to optimize metabolic roles of amino acids. The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition Volume 101, Issue 6, June 2015, Pages 1330S-1338S
5. Johnstone, A. Safety and efficacy of high-protein diets for weight loss.
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/proceedings-of-the-nutrition-society/article/safety-and-efficacy-of-highprotein-diets-for-weight-loss/88D02B63EC2E41F9C8DDF33220A0538D>
6. Hollingworth TW, Oke SM, Patel H, et al

Getting to grips with sarcopenia: recent advances and practical management for the gastroenterologist
Frontline Gastroenterology 2021;12:53-61.