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IFIC FOUNDATION

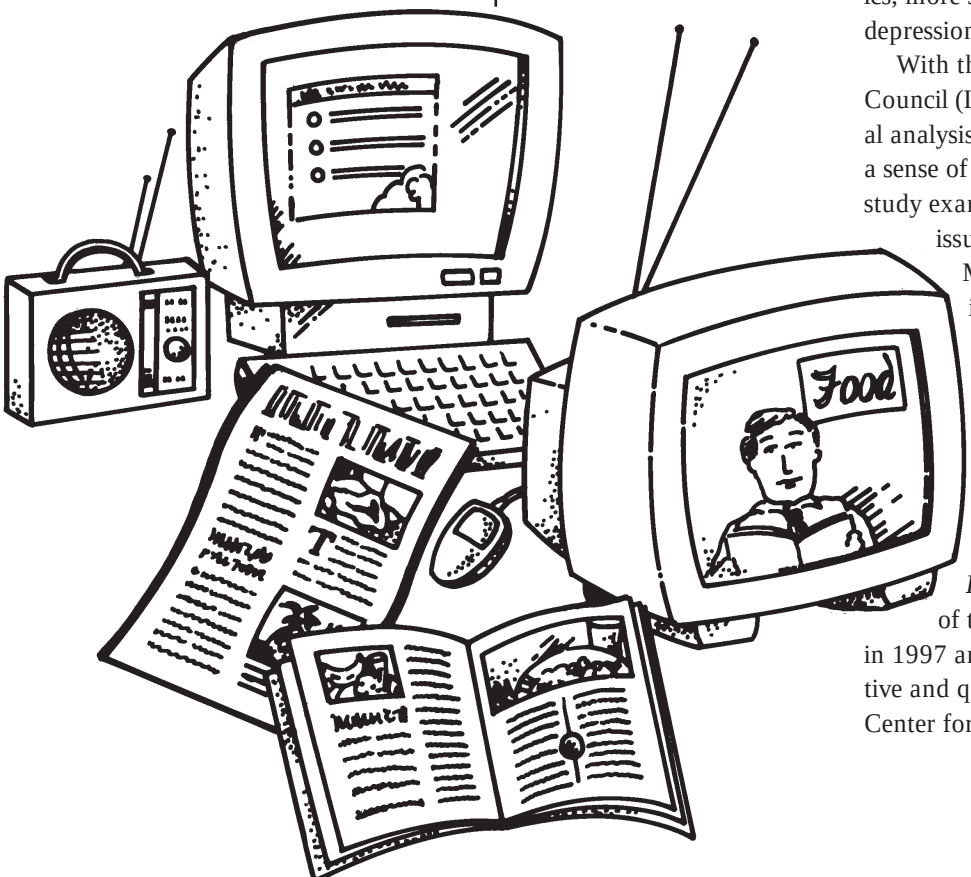
food Insight™

Current Topics in Food Safety and Nutrition

Inside Insight

A Slice of Food News

Food news—it's everywhere. It's in an article in the newspaper as you ride the train to work, it comes as advice from a magazine at the supermarket checkout, or it's in a quick news flash as you doze in front of the evening news just before bedtime.



Not surprisingly, consumers repeatedly cite the news media as the primary source of nutrition and food safety information. In fact, a 1999 study by Princeton Research Associates for Rodale Press found that health news was the number one topic that consumers follow "very closely," more so than local events/people news, sports news, national events/people, or business or consumer news. However, the same survey found that half of all adults say that nutrition news and news about vitamins and supplements are two of the most confusing news topics, more so than health news about cancer, heart disease, depression, or diabetes.

With this backdrop, the International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation commissioned its third biannual analysis of food news, *Food for Thought III*. To provide a sense of the typical food news consumers digest, the study examined the nutrition, diet, and food safety news issued by print, broadcast, and on-line media in May, June, and July 1999. The sample of media included a cross section of national and local daily newspapers, network and local television news, newswire services, and monthly magazines. These "traditional" media outlets were also supplemented by four news media websites in acknowledgment of the growing popularity of online news for consumers.

The results of this new 1999 *Food for Thought III* research can be compared directly with those of two earlier *Food for Thought* studies completed in 1997 and 1995. All three studies are based on quantitative and qualitative content analyses, conducted by the Center for Media and Public Affairs on behalf of the IFIC

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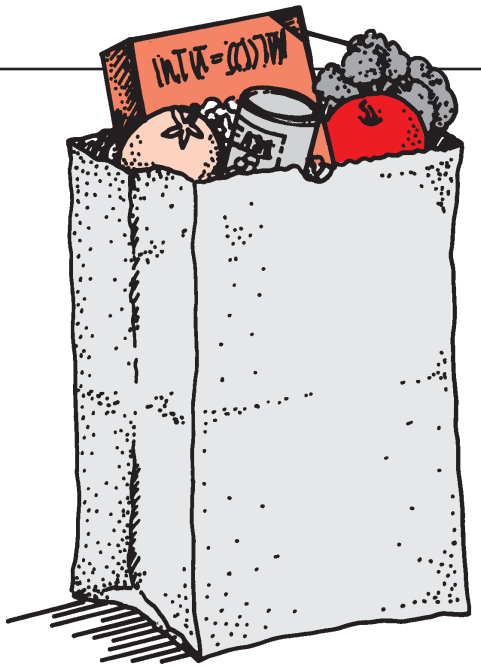
A Status Report on Senior Nutritional Needs



The rapid "graying of America" has prompted increased interest in exploring the needs of older Americans. Research on the nutritional needs of older people is no longer on the "back burner" but has moved to the forefront of scientific interest and attention.

The primary reason for the increased attention to the health needs of these Americans is that they make up a large proportion of the population—and it's growing rapidly. Why the growth? One reason is that during the 20th century life expectancy roughly doubled from approximately 40 years to almost 80 years. This longer life span, combined with the wave of aging Americans contributed to an 11-fold growth in the over-65 segment of the population during the 1900s. (Census bureau statistical brief from *USDA Nutrition Insights*) In fact, the over-65 age group is the most rapidly growing segment of the American population, and within this group the number of those over age 85 years is increasing most rapidly. (*Journal of The American Dietetic Association 10/96*) Experts predict that more than 12 million Americans will be over age 85 by 2040.

Changing Nutritional Needs

Nutritional needs change with age. As people become older, a balanced and varied eating pattern remains important, but certain health conditions and lifestyle factors—as well as general physical needs—can alter nutritional requirements. Data from the third *National Health and Nutrition Examination Study* (NHANES III) suggest that older people are at particular risk of inadequate diets because of the presence of chronic disease, physical disability, poor teeth, multiple medications, limited income, and social isolation. In addition, a decreased sensitivity of taste and smell and a sedentary lifestyle can adversely affect nutritional status.

In general, older people need at least the same amounts of vitamins and minerals as they did when they were younger. Some major changes also affect nearly every person as he or she ages. These include:

- A decrease in caloric needs by 25 percent
- Increased susceptibility to dehydration due to a reduced sense of thirst and bodily changes
- Increased use of medications that can affect both appetite and vitamin and mineral needs

Leslie Bonci, a spokesperson for The American Dietetic Association, emphasized that, because of these factors, older people need to get more "bang for their buck" in nutritional terms. "Some people can optimally fulfill nutrient needs by eating more frequent minimeals with a glass of water each time," explained Bonci.

"Also, quantity of food, not quality changes with age. Select foods with high nutrient density such as whole grains, legumes, low-fat dairy foods, fruits, and vegetables with color to the flesh like dark green and deep orange, red or yellow," she added.

Specific Nutrient Needs for Aging Americans

With lower levels of food consumption and decreased caloric needs, getting the proper amounts of nutrients becomes a greater challenge—and often at a time in life when interest in nutrition and cooking is waning. Although there is scientific discussion and even some controversy surrounding the appropriate nutrient recom-

Dietary Reference Intakes for Older Individuals

	Ages 51 to 70		Ages 70+	
Nutrient or Mineral	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*
Calcium	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200
Phosphorus	700	700	700	700
Magnesium	320	420	320	420
Vitamin D	10	10	15	15
Fluoride	3	4	3	4
Thiamin	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.2
Riboflavin	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.3
Niacin	14	16	14	16
Vitamin B6	1.5	1.7	1.5	1.7
Folate	400	400	400	400
Vitamin B12	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4
Pantothenic Acid	5	5	5	5
Biotin	30	30	30	30
Choline	425	550	425	550

Source: National Academy of Sciences, 1999.

mendations for older people, strides have been made in determining more accurate estimations of nutrient needs for this age group. The following nutrients were chosen for close examination because the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs) or Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs) of these nutrients for older people differ substantially from those for younger adults.

Protein: Most people think of protein as necessary for a growing body, but even though adults and older people have stopped growing, protein-containing foods are still important for good health. Protein is essential for maintenance of body tissue and helps keep the immune system functioning properly. Insufficient intake of protein can result in an accelerated loss of muscle mass (which is already a problem for older people), an increased risk of infection, and low energy reserves during infection or illness.

According to The American Dietetic Association, women and men over the age of 50 should consume 60 to 75 grams of protein per day, depending on individual weight—this is a higher level than that for younger people. Some experts theorize that older people may have a decreased ability to utilize protein efficiently in the body and therefore require more of it to make up the difference. Also, older people who are home-bound or living in elder-care facilities are more likely to have protein-calorie malnutrition, so extra care should be given to overall food intake, protein intake, and general diet quality for these individuals.

Protein Tips:

- Stretch your budget by keeping meat, poultry, and fish portions small, while adding other less expensive protein sources such as eggs, peanut butter, legumes, and dairy products to the diet.
- Chop meat or poultry into small pieces if they are hard to chew. Have teeth and gums checked if chewing difficulties prevent you from achieving a good diet.

Calcium and Vitamin D: Calcium is the most abundant mineral in the body and one that's important for both men and women. The body uses calcium to keep teeth and bones strong, but calcium is also vital for the contraction and relaxation of muscles (including the heart muscle), blood clotting, and making new cells and body tissues. In addition to its major role in the prevention of osteoporosis, calcium may also have important roles in decreasing the risk of kidney stones (when the calcium is from food sources), limiting the growth of cancer cells in the colon, and controlling blood pressure.

Recommended Dietary Allowances for Individuals Ages 51 and Older, Revised 1989 (Abridged)

Nutrient or Mineral	Females	Males
Protein (g)	50	63
Vitamin A (RE)	800	1000
VitaminE (αTE)	8	10
Vitamin K (µg)	65	80
Vitamin C (mg)	60	60
Iron (mg)	10	10
Zinc (mg)	12	15
Iodine (µg)	150	150
Selenium (µg)	55	7

Most older people do not get enough calcium, and diets that are low in calcium are frequently low in vitamin D as well. In addition to inadequate intake, certain medications can interfere with calcium and vitamin D absorption and retention.

Vitamin D's importance in helping calcium function optimally can not be overstated. While dairy products are often fortified with vitamin D, older people who do not tolerate dairy products well can be at significant risk for low vitamin D status. As people age their ability to absorb vitamin D (and therefore calcium) is diminished because of fewer intestinal vitamin D receptors. Most people know that our bodies can make vitamin D if our skin is exposed to sunlight; however, even that ability fades with age.

For all of these reasons, the DRIs for calcium and vitamin D are higher for older people than for others.

Calcium Tips

If dairy products are not well tolerated, try the following:

- Drink smaller amounts
- Drink reduced-lactose milk
- Take lactase enzyme tablets
- Choose yogurt with live, active cultures

Vitamin B6: The DRI for vitamin B6 (also called pyridoxine) for older people is substantially higher than that for adults of other ages. This is due to the well-documented age-related declines in levels of vitamin B6 in blood and the substantial body of evidence that shows that vitamin B6 levels of older populations is low. This is another case in which medications can have an adverse effect on the vitamin levels as well.

Low vitamin B6 (as well as low folate) levels are associated with increased homocysteine levels. Homocysteine is now recognized as an important marker of coronary artery disease and stroke. Even aside from this, however, low vitamin B6 levels are associated with insulin resistance, and there is some evidence of increased prevalence of carpal tunnel syndrome when levels of the vitamin are low. Adequate Vitamin B6 intake can aid the functioning of the immune system, can assist in the metabolism of food, and is necessary for red blood cell formation, among other things.

Vitamin B6 Tip

Sources of vitamin B6 include bananas, whole-wheat bread, chicken, eggs, oatmeal, peanut butter, pork, potatoes, brown rice, tuna, shellfish, and walnuts.

Looking to the Future

Additional research on the nutritional needs of older people is in full swing—and shows no signs of letting up anytime soon. According to Bonci, a focus on disease prevention and the prevention of disease progression will continue, and additional research into antioxidants and phytochemicals will be of interest to people in this age group. "As we look to the future, the availability of more fortified foods such as calcium-fortified milk and juices and cereal fortified with folic acid will provide older adults with new and varied ways to eat well and stay well."

Foundation. Each study provides a snapshot of food news, yet the results enable food and health professionals to see general themes and trends in news reporting and understand how to better communicate with journalists about food and health science issues.

The findings of the 1999 study show changes over the past four years; however, the background, major themes, and patterns remain fairly consistent.

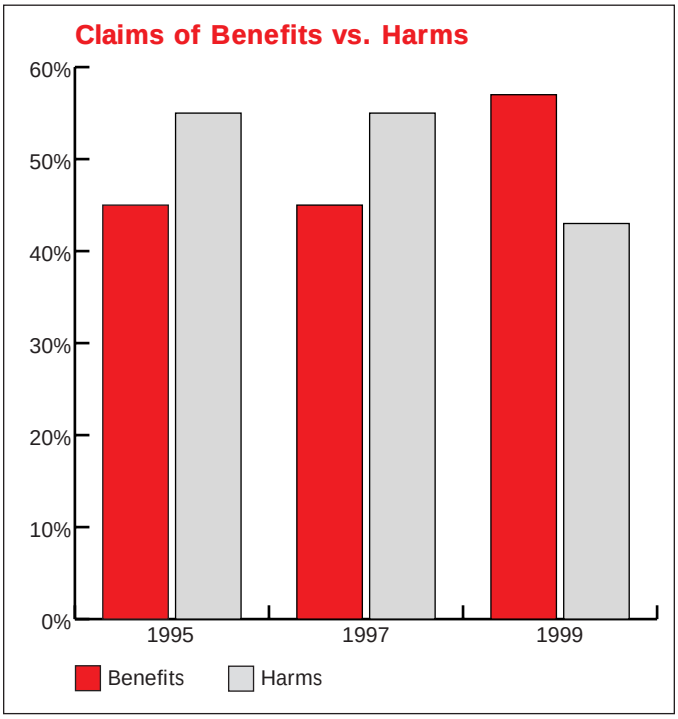
Food is Big News

A staggering 1,260 nutrition, health, and food safety stories were printed and aired during the three months in 1999. This represents a 53 percent growth compared with the 1997 study and 31 percent over the 1995 benchmark study. Although some of the increase was attributed to better sample collection, it reflects a significant increase in coverage and confirmation of the public appetite for food news.

Food as Friend, Not Foe

In a marked departure from the two preceding studies, the latest *Food for Thought III* analysis revealed a shift in the overall media portrayal of food as friend rather than foe. Twenty nine percent of all coverage focused on general wellness and the health boosting aspects of food—the role of food in disease prevention, foods' functional components such as the antioxidants, vitamins and minerals, and fiber in foods.

The topic of functional foods made up a large part of the disease risk reduction discussions, with certain food components' ability to reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease, and other medical conditions winning specific praise. These discussions produced stories that tended to extol the benefits associated with foods instead of claims of the harms associated with consuming too much or too little of a food. In fact, in the 1999 study the number of stories with claims of benefits clearly outweighed the number with claims of harms (57 versus 43 percent respectively), whereas in the earlier studies the number of stories with claims of harms outweighed benefits (55 versus 45 percent respectively). Despite a surprising consistency in the list of benefits and harms, for the first time stories focused less on the possible negative consequences associated with foods. Instead, stories tended to herald the "carrot" of health benefit without including the "stick" warning of harm to those who failed to follow the advice. IFIC Foundation president Sylvia Rowe commented, "Consumers tell us that they respond best to positive reinforcement rather than negative messages. I am encouraged that the shift in reporting wellness and health promotion may elicit a very positive response in terms of public understanding, and perhaps even behavior change over time."



Leading Topics of Discussion in 1999

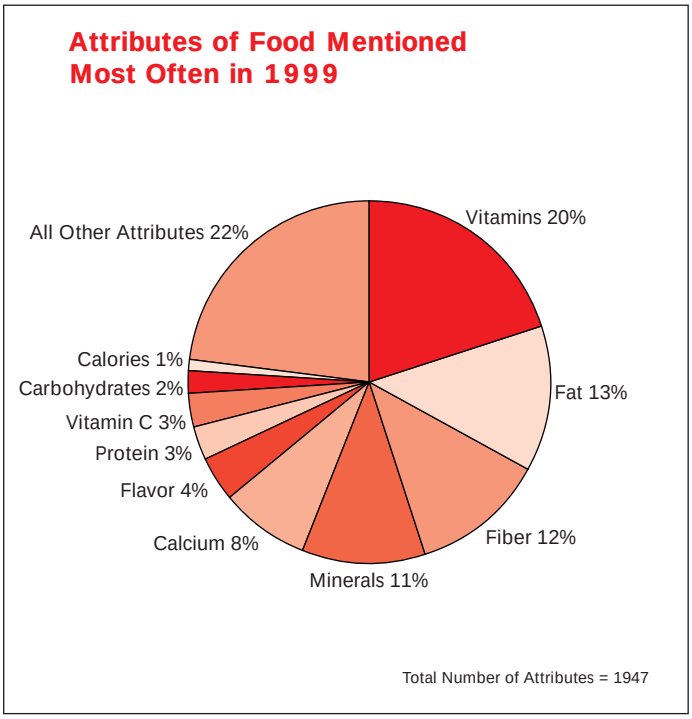
TOPICS	No.	Percent
Disease Prevention	276	13
Foodborne Illness	156	7
Biotechnology	132	6
Fat Intake	131	6
Functional Foods	124	6
Disease Causation	119	6
Vitamin/Mineral Intake	89	4
Fiber Intake	51	3
Antioxidants	48	3
Caloric Intake	44	2
All Others	903	44
TOTAL	2073	100

What's in a Food

With the portrayal of food as a friend and not a foe, came an increased tendency of the media to mention the specific nutrients and other attributes (e.g., vitamins, fat, fiber, minerals, calcium, flavor, protein, calories, carbohydrates) that characterize a food. The 1999 *Food for Thought* mentioned almost 2,000 attributes whereas the 1997 study mentioned approximately 1,500 attributes and the 1995 study mentioned just less than 1,000. Identifying specific attributes helped food news become more consumer friendly by turning abstract concepts, such as functional food components for wellness and disease risk reduction, into specific shopping lists.

Other News

Food safety and food-borne illness made up a 7 percent share of all coverage. Although prominent in the three months ana-



lyzed, this placed it as the number two topic following disease prevention, a drop from the number one topic in 1997, when it was the topic of 10 percent of discussions about food. Brand new to the list of top discussions and in third place was the subject of food biotechnology. During the months studied by the IFIC Foundation in 1999, however, U.S. media reporting on food biotechnology was still very general and rarely mentioned a specific food or what traits had been improved with the technology.

Doctors Speak up:

A review of the sources quoted in food news revealed a significant rise in the number of independent scientific researchers and experts. Food producers, including trade associations and chefs, were the second most quoted group, followed by governmental sources, environmental and consumer groups, and medical sources. According to Dr. Sharon Friedman, Iacocca professor and director of the Science and Environment Writing Program of Lehigh University, "the media's increased use of scientific and medical experts as sources adds to the credibility of the articles they produce. This good practice bodes well for better public knowledge about food and nutrition as long as reporters include at least several sources in the story to provide various viewpoints."

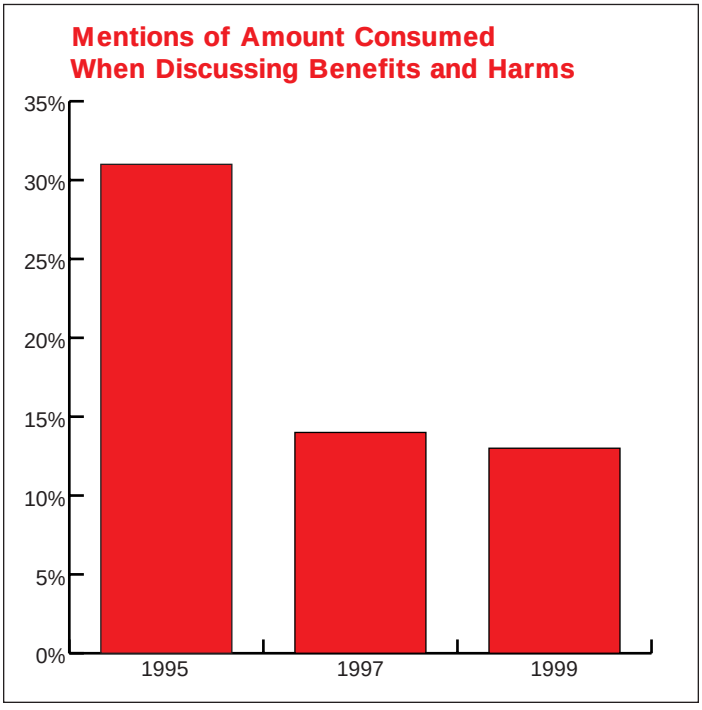
Missing Information

One consistent yet troubling finding across all three *Food for Thought* studies was the relative absence of some contextual details. Advice offered by news stories rarely specified how much, how often, or to whom advice applied. When discussing a potential benefit or harm of food, only one in five stories mentioned the frequency of consumption (how often), and only one in eight included the amount consumed (how much) or a particular risk/benefit group.

Many media stories failed to link the food news to specific scientific research but relied on the vague, uninformative phrase "studies show." However, when media reported on emerging nutrition, food safety, and health research, their accounts did include some key details (e.g., method of exposure, dosage levels, basic research design, and use of a control group), even if other details (e.g., statistical significance or causal associations) were omitted. "Including contextual information about food and nutrition research provides important information for readers and viewers to use to evaluate the significance of the findings themselves," Dr. Friedman said. "That the media are including some key details is a step in the right direction, but they need to do it more often," she concluded.

The *Food for Thought* research series clearly documents that food *is* news. The public appetite for food and health news has not diminished over the past five years and continues to prompt media outlets to devote considerable space and attention to food and health news and information. Rowe concluded, "We hope the findings may help food and health professionals recognize that they may need to prioritize or emphasize certain details with journalists in order for context to be included for consumers."

The full report and executive summary *(Food for Thought III)* can be ordered from the form on page 7. The executive summary is also available online at http://ificinfo.health.org/.



NewsBites

Working Together for Good Health

Making the connection between nutrition and physical activity for good health isn't just important—it's imperative. Thus, two key professional organizations, The American Dietetic Association (ADA) and the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), joined with the International Food Information Council (IFIC) to promote linking nutrition and physical activity messages for their ADA and ACSM professional members and consumers.

The August 1999 issue of the *Journal of The American Dietetic Association* (JADA) published the article "For a Healthful Lifestyle: Promoting Cooperation among Nutrition Professionals and Physical Activity Professionals" which contains a collection of the data gathered by a jointly sponsored Gallup survey of ADA and ACSM professional members' nutrition and physical activity information sources and needs.

The article summarizes the findings of the Gallup survey with the goal of helping improve communication among nutrition and physical activity professionals and increase the use of existing resources in each area to further mutual goals.

The survey findings underscore how receptive nutrition and physical activity professionals are to the message of linking nutrition and physical activity for a healthful lifestyle. Helpful information does not have to be created; professionals simply need to be made aware of existing resources. Partnerships among interested organizations such as ADA, ACSM, and IFIC can help further this effort to help all groups achieve the common goal of helping consumers adopt more healthful lifestyles.

To obtain a reprint of the JADA article, write to:

JADA Nutrition/Physical Activity Article Reprint
P.O. Box 65708
Washington, DC 20035

January Designated "National Biotechnology Month"

Recognizing the ever-increasing significance of biotechnology, the United States Senate approved Senate Resolution 200 designating January 2000 as "National Biotechnology Month." The resolution addressed the importance of biotechnology to the research and development of medical, agricultural, industrial and environmental products.

The resolution also cited several benefits of biotechnology, including improved crop yields and farm productivity, enhanced quality of food, improved environmental conditions and the increased life span of Americans.

The impact of food biotechnology is far-reaching. We can expect fruits and vegetables with enhanced nutrient content and improved quality. Biotechnology will also impact the success of food safety methods by eliminating allergy-causing proteins in some foods, and better identifying toxins, pathogens and contaminants. By producing crops enhanced through biotechnology, farmers can reduce their dependence on chemical inputs.

President Clinton acknowledged National Biotechnology Month in a proclamation he issued in response to the Senate resolution. "We recognize the enormous potential that biotechnology holds for improving the quality of life here in the United States and around the world," his proclamation reads. "These technologies… promise to make unprecedented contributions to public health and safety, a cleaner environment, and economic prosperity." To view the president's proclamation in its entirety, see http://www.pub.whitehouse.gov.

IFIC Caffeine Resource Kit

A new four-color resource kit, *"Caffeine: Clarifying the Controversies,"* contains up-to-date information on caffeine for nutrition educators, health professionals, journalists, and consumers. The kit includes a referenced white paper, two consumer brochures, a reproducible tear sheet, article reprints, and a question-and-answer section with the most frequently asked questions about caffeine and health.

For a copy of this resource kit, send $5.00 for postage and handling to:

Caffeine Resource Kit
c/o IFIC Foundation
1100 Connecticut Ave, N.W.
Suite 430
Washington, DC 20036

WHAT'S NEW at http://ificinfo.health.org?

Where am I? Want to know where your site ranks in search engines? Submit your site to the free detective at http://www.did-it.com. and you will receive a monthly report showing where your site appears in the major search engines. In two search engines (AOLNETFIND and INFOSEEK), IFIC Foundation On-Line ranked number 1. Last month, IFIC Foundation On-Line ranked in the top 100 in 7 of the top 11 search engines.

It's All About Healthy Lifestyles

Are you seeking a fresh, fun, and innovative way to help your clients and patients eat better and be more active? Then the new *It's All About You* Nutrition Communicator's Tool Kit is for you.

The Tool Kit is a research-based education program that communicates the messages of the *It's All About You* consumer message campaign, developed by the Dietary Guidelines Alliance. The Alliance is a partnership of leading health organizations, the government, and the food industry whose goal is to provide concrete, practical advice for application of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

The Kit works to motivate behavior change because the message campaign upon which it was based was designed for consumers by consumers. During focus groups and pilot testing, consumers provided feedback on the appearance, content, and usability of the Kit's components to ensure their appeal and ability to motivate behavior change. Testing with nutrition communicators helped ensure the Tool Kit's efficacy as a nutrition education tool in a variety of settings.

Components of the Tool Kit include:

- Leader Guide — The Leader Guide provides background information and ideas for using the Tool Kit in a variety of settings.
- Owner's Manual for Your Body — The Owner's Manual is an engaging and easy-to-use consumer handout with numerous practical tips for eating better and being more active.
- Video —The Video is a humorous, upbeat look at helping REAL people overcome REAL challenges to achieving a more healthful lifestyle.

The *It's All About You* Tool Kit is available for $19.95 from The American Dietetic Association catalog at www.eatright.org, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association at www.beefnutrition.org, or from the IFIC Foundation publications order form below.

New IFIC Foundation Publications

Below are the newest releases from the IFIC Foundation. Single copies of most publications are available free-of-charge. For a comprehensive listing of publications or for bulk prices, please request the IFIC Foundation Publications List below.

☐ **Publications List (MI-4010)** A complete list of publications and *Food Insight* reprints available from the IFIC Foundation.

☐ **It's All About You Nutrition Communicator's Tool Kit (MI-4230)** A new nutrition communicator's Tool Kit to help consumers achieve healthy, active lifestyles. The Tool Kit illustrates positive, simple, and consistent nutrition and health messages and contains an "Owner's Manual for the Body," Leader's Guide, consumer video, and much more. Please send ____ copies at $19.95 each, plus $2.50 shipping and handling. Enclosed is a check for $____.

☐ **Food for Thought III Research (MI-4230)** A quantitative and qualitative analysis of food news as reported by 39 media outlets during three months in 1999, with findings compared with data from two earlier studies. Please send ____ copies of the Full Report at $20.00 each. Executive Summary: Free.

☐ **Food Biotechnology Resource Kit (MI-4080)** This updated and redesigned kit is a compilation of backgrounders on food biotechnology topics, including product benefits, consumer attitudes, federal safeguards and labeling, and the environment. The most recent data on consumer attitudes and government regulatory issues are included. The kit also includes positions of other leading health professional organizations, along with an extensive resource list. Please send ____ copies at $10.00 each. Enclosed is a check for $_____.

☐ **Understanding Food Allergy (EB-2035)** A patient education brochure that provides general consumers, patients and parents with the basics of food allergy, food intolerance and food idiosyncrasy. Endorsed by the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology and The Food Allergy Network.

☐ **Benefits of Balance: Managing Fat in Your Diet (EB-2080)** A new consumer brochure details how lower-fat foods and foods with fat replacers can be included in the overall diet to balance food choices. It was developed in partnership with the Food and Drug Administration.

☐ **Caffeine and Health: Clarifying the Controversies (IR-3020)** This updated IFIC Review highlights new research, provides background information on caffeine and seeks to dispel misconceptions that exist about the ingredient.

☐ **Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Teaching Set (MI-4200)** A teaching set designed to help kids ages 9-15 understand the importance of combining nutrition and physical activity. The set features a 22"x34" two-sided color poster highlighting the Physical Activity Pyramid alongside the Food Guide Pyramid. Set includes the Ten Tips to Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for You brochure, reproducible slick and poster. Please send ____ copies at $3.50 and $1.50 shipping and handling.

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The Making of a *Myth*

Remember playing the telephone game when you were young? The objective was to whisper a sentence in someone's ear who in turn, would whisper it to someone else. Often, by the time the last person received the message, it was very different from the original. Something similar can occur even today with some of the myths about certain foods that we eat.

Food myths can begin in any number of ways. Sometimes they are old wives' tales that just won't go away. Other times, a source will quote incorrect information about a food and the "fact" becomes conventional wisdom. And, with today's information technology, myths can become far-reaching in a matter of days.

"We need to dispel these myths before they go too far," said Bob Gravani, PhD, a professor of food science at Cornell University. "People need to be sure the advice they are getting or the information they hear or read is scientifically accurate and technically correct. The best way to get an answer to these questions is to seek input from a scientifically trained, qualified professional such as a dietitian, food scientist or other health professional."

Following are a few other examples of food recent food myths:

MYTH: Sugar causes hyperactivity.

FACT: Numerous studies have consistently shown that sugar intake does not negatively affect behavior in the vast majority of children. In fact, research findings show that sugar may actually be calming to both children and adults.

MYTH: Peanut butter contains high amounts of trans fats.

FACT: On the contrary, peanut butter contains only trace amounts of trans fats. Commercial peanut butter does contain partially hydrogenated oil (often associated with the presence of trans fats) as an ingredient to help prevent oil separation. If it didn't, you would have to stir your peanut butter before spreading it. But, the amount of partially hydrogenated oil added is very small and this oil is also very low in trans fat, resulting in a trace amount of trans fat per serving.

What and who should you believe? Rather than avoiding foods based on what may not be accurate information, you may want to consider the following:

- Is the source you heard it from reputable? Is the source a qualified professional such as a registered dietitian, a medical doctor or a food scientist? (Just because someone is the author of a book does not make him or her an expert; anyone can write a book.)
- Has this finding been scientifically proven? Is there a significant body of research showing that what you have heard is true?
- Has the food been classified as "good" or "bad"? In moderation, all foods can be part of a healthful diet.

In the end, your mother was absolutely right when she told you: "Don't believe everything you hear."

food Insight®

Current Topics in Food Safety and Nutrition

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