

FOOD Insight™

IFIC Foundation
<http://ific.org>

January / February 2004

Food For Thought V

Network Anchor: "Turning now to our favorite news subject, FOOD! What's going on?"

In a word — Obesity!

According to new research commissioned by the International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation, the issue of obesity and weight management shot to the top of the charts in food reporting in 2003. The *Food For Thought V* study also discovered that issues related to functional foods, dietary fat, and disease risk reduction were top-of-mind for journalists who cover food safety and nutrition. This latest look at food in the news also found that many stories provide insufficient context for people to make important decisions with regard to their health.

Food For Thought V is the fifth in an ongoing series of quantitative and qualitative analyses which now stretch back nine years to form one of the longest-ranging and most comprehensive research projects of its kind. The surveys, carried out by the Washington, DC-based Center for Media and Public Affairs, offer biannual snapshots of what consumers are hearing and reading about food and nutrition. Taken as a whole, the surveys can provide insight into long-term trends in the coverage of food stories.

During a three-month research period (May through July) in 2003, the

Center monitored 40 major national and regional outlets, including five Internet sites that originate news. The *Food For Thought V* survey sample included a cross section of national and local daily newspapers, network and local television news, newswire services, and monthly magazines, in addition to the media Web sites. Altogether, 1,215 news reports on food safety and nutrition topics were analyzed in the news vehicles surveyed.

Cooking Up Better Health

So what have researchers found out?

Over the course of the five *Food For Thought* surveys, researchers have observed several trends in media coverage of food issues, and all with the same theme, diet and health:

- *Obesity tops the charts* — Obesity and weight management has become the most popular food issue in the media, accounting for nearly one of every six stories monitored in the 2003 survey.
- *Functional food stories more complete* — Functional food coverage has become more comprehensive, incorporating discussions of specific compounds with general dietary advice.

- *Dietary fats back in the pan* — News coverage of dietary fats is up and has morphed into more detailed discussions of the various types of fats, specifically trans fatty acids.
- *Getting healthy still the goal* — health promotion as a goal of sound nutrition continues to be an important part of coverage.
- *But what does it all mean?* — A consistent feature of news about food over the five *Food For Thought* studies has been a lack of context in the reporting of food news, an absence of perspective necessary for consumers to actually make use of the information.



Obesity News Hits the Top of the Coverage Charts

Although several major trends in coverage have emerged since the initial survey, perhaps the most dramatic

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Applying Dietary Reference Intakes to Nutrition Labeling

Most nutrients listed in the Nutrition Facts panel on food labels are expressed as a Percent Daily Value (%DV). The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) devised the DV to implement the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act (NLEA) of 1990. NLEA requires that the nutrition label enable consumers to understand the relative significance of a food's nutrient content in the context of a health-promoting total daily diet. However, the science behind setting the DVs for most vitamins and minerals is at least 35 years old and these values are based on the 1968 Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs). In addition, the science behind the DVs for the macronutrients, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, and fiber is at least 15 years old.

Providing current science on dietary nutrient needs, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) developed reports resulting from expert review of the RDAs. Initiated in 1993, the reviews have encompassed not only the science underlying the numerical values of the RDAs but also how the RDAs were used for diet planning, nutritional assessment, and nutrition policy development. The outcome has been a series of reports on a set of reference values for nutrient needs — collectively referred to as Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs) (Table 1) — as well as on the appropriate use of the DRIs.

As a first step in revising the DVs to reflect current science, the FDA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), along with Health Canada, asked the IOM to undertake a study of how to use the DRIs in nutrition labeling and fortification. An expert committee was charged with providing recommendations for translating the science of the DRI reports to reference values that could be used for the next revision of nutrition

labeling regulations. The IOM committee released its report, *Dietary Reference Intakes: Guiding Principles for Nutrition Labeling and Food Fortification*, in December 2003. The report recommends 10 guiding principles for the FDA to consider in nutrition labeling (Table 2).

| Nutrition Facts | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Serving Size: 1 tsp. (0.5g) | |
| Servings Per Container: 110 | |
| Amount Per Serving | |
| Calories 0 | |
| | % Daily Value* |
| Total Fat 0g | 0% |
| Sodium 0mg | 0% |
| Total Carb. Less than 1g | 0% |
| Protein 0g | 0% |

Not a significant source of calories from fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, dietary fiber, sugars, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium and iron.

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.

A major premise of the guiding principles is that the reference values used for food labeling are not target nutrient intakes for any one individual or population group, and are not intended for use in the planning of individual diets. Rather, the reference values are intended to meet the NLEA requirements. The committee concluded that a population-weighted Estimated Average Requirement (EAR) represents the most accurate reflection of the true contribution of a particular food to the total nutrient needs of the general population — defined as all individuals four years of age and older, excluding pregnant and lactating women. The EAR is one of the group of values of the DRI (see Table 1). The committee also

recommended guiding principles for nutrients that lack an EAR (e.g., fiber, calcium, and vitamin D) or do not have a DRI (e.g., total fat, saturated fat, *trans* fats and cholesterol).

DVs based on a population-weighted EAR differ from those developed in the light of new scientific evidence. Past practice generally based the DVs for vitamins and minerals on the highest RDAs for all individuals in the general population: the logic was to set a value that covered the needs of almost every individual in the population to prevent deficiency. This approach, however, provides an exaggerated impression of the total daily needs for most people and systematically underrepresents the true contribution of an individual food to the population's needs. For example, a one-ounce slice of whole wheat bread contains 1 milligram of iron: this is 5 percent of the current DV (which is based on the RDA of iron for women ages 31 to 50 years). Using a population-weighted EAR to establish the DV would result in a DV of 15 percent.

Revision of the DVs so that they are based on a population-weighted EAR will reduce the numerical values — and consequently increase the percent DV — for almost all vitamins and minerals. Application of the guiding principles for the macronutrients, fiber, and other food components may increase the numerical values for some and decrease them for others. Such changes might affect the values required for a product to make some nutrient content and health claims if the current criteria are retained, as they depend in part on the DVs. In addition, consumer research could help guide the FDA in rulemaking for revision of the DVs based on the 10 principles (see Table 2) and consumer education would facilitate consumer understanding of the new reference values on food labels.

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Table 1. Dietary Reference Intakes

[Note: The DRI, rather than a single value itself, is an umbrella term that refers to the following set of reference values for a particular nutrient.]

Estimated Average Requirement (EAR): the average daily nutrient intake level estimated to meet the requirements of half of the healthy individuals in a life stage and gender group — it is used to plan and assess dietary adequacies for population groups.

Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA): the average daily dietary nutrient intake level sufficient to meet the nutrient requirement of nearly all (97 to 98 percent) healthy individuals in a particular life stage and gender group — it is derived from the EAR.

Adequate Intake (AI): the recommended average daily intake level based on observed or experimentally determined approximations or estimates of nutrient intake for a group (or groups) of apparently healthy people that are assumed to be adequate — it is used when an RDA cannot be determined.

Tolerable Upper Intake Level (UL): the highest average daily nutrient intake level that is likely to pose no risk of adverse health effects for almost all individuals in the general population. As intake increases above the UL, the potential risk of adverse effects may increase.

Acceptable Macronutrient Distribution Range: a range of intakes of a particular energy source that is associated with a reduced risk of chronic disease while providing adequate intakes of essential nutrients — it is technically not a Dietary Reference Intake.

Table 2. Guiding Principles for Nutrition Labeling

1. Nutrition Information in the Nutrition Facts panel should continue to be expressed as percent Daily Value (%DV).
2. The Daily Values (DVs) should be based on a population-weighted reference value.
3. A population-weighted Estimated Average Requirement (EAR) should be the basis for DVs for those nutrients for which EARs have been identified.
4. If no EAR has been set for a nutrient, then a population-weighted Adequate Intake (AI) should be used as the basis for the DV.
5. The Acceptable Macronutrient Distribution Ranges (AMDRs) should be the basis for the macronutrients protein, total carbohydrate, and total fat.
6. Two thousand calories (2,000 kcal) should be used, when needed, as the basis for expressing energy intake when developing DVs.
7. The DVs for saturated fatty acids, *trans* fatty acids, and cholesterol should be set at a level that is as low as possible in keeping with an achievable health-promoting diet.
8. While the general population is best identified as all individuals 4 years of age and older, the committee recognized four distinctive life stages during which individuals' nutrient needs are physiologically different from the main population. These are: infancy, toddlers ages 1 to 3 years, pregnancy, and lactation. Development of DVs for these groups should be guided by the following guiding principles:
 - Infants (age <1 year): one set of DVs based on the EARs or AIs of older infants (ages 7-12 months).
 - Toddlers (ages 1-3 years): one set of DVs based on the EARs or AIs.
 - Pregnant Women: one set of DVs based on the population-weighted EARs or AIs for all Dietary Reference Intake (DRI) pregnancy groups.
 - Lactating Women: one set of DVs based on the population weighted EARs or AIs for all DRI lactation groups.
9. The Supplement Facts panel should use the same DVs as the Nutrition Facts panel.
10. Absolute amounts should be included in the Nutrition Facts and Supplement Facts panels for all nutrients.

Source: Dietary Reference Intakes: Guiding Principles for Nutrition Labeling and Fortification (2003). Food and Nutrition Board, Institute of Medicine.

Helping Consumers Choose a Safe and Effective Weight Management Program:

The Confusing World of Weight Loss

The latest government survey shows that 64 percent of Americans are overweight or obese, up nearly 10 percent from just a decade ago. Overweight and obese individuals are at increased risk for a litany of health problems including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers (endometrial, breast, prostate, colon), gall bladder disease, osteoarthritis, respiratory problems, and more. Furthermore, some data show that even when people do manage to lose weight, there is a significant challenge in keeping the pounds off over the long term.

In a society with such a high prevalence of overweight and obesity, quick fix weight loss methods are in high demand. Consequently, misleading and false promises of substantial weight loss from a variety of different methods are pervasive. An example is an ad that assures consumers that they can “Sleep...and lose weight in just a few nights... You eat whatever you want — 5 pounds lost every night.”

It seems that claims such as this would be clearly outrageous, however, weight loss is an earnest issue for many people. Consequently, consumers spend \$37.1 billion each year on all types of weight management programs and products and it is estimated that this figure is growing at a rate of six to seven percent a year. Although the worst that many of these weight loss services do is lighten consumers' wallets, some can be



the information necessary for the consumer to make an informed decision about using the program.

Providers also benefit. Openly disclosing key details about their programs increases consumer trust and can even motivate providers to improve the quality of their service.

downright dangerous.

Although there are also countless numbers of safe and effective programs and services to promote weight loss, most consumers aren't equipped with the knowledge to sort through the maze of options and choose a safe and effective weight management option.

To address this knowledge gap, the Partnership for Healthy Weight Management developed the Voluntary Guidelines for Providers of Weight Loss Products or Services.

The Partnership is a coalition composed of representatives from science, academia, the health care professions, government, commercial enterprises, and organizations promoting the public interest. Its mission is to promote the provision of sound guidance to the public on strategies for achieving and maintaining a healthy weight. The Guidelines are a set of criteria for disclosing information to consumers about weight loss services at the point of sale that are not necessarily conveyed through advertising. If a provider adheres to the Guidelines, there is an assurance that the provider will supply all of

Those who agree to follow the Voluntary Guidelines for Providers of Weight Loss Products or Services must, at a minimum, give consumers the following information:

- What is involved in following the program?
- The qualifications of staff that assist consumers with the program.
- The risks of being overweight and any risks of using the provider's service.
- All costs involved in participating in the program.
- Advice for maintaining weight loss.
- Although not required, providers are encouraged to disclose the success rates of others who follow the program.

To make it easy for consumers to obtain and use the information, the Partnership for Healthy Weight Management and the International Food Information Council Foundation developed a consumer brochure entitled *Finding a Weight Loss Program that Works for You*.

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Helping Consumers Choose a Safe and Effective Weight Management Program: The Confusing World of Weight Loss

The brochure is the cornerstone of informing consumers about the Guidelines. It provides consumers with the key questions that they should ask a provider when evaluating a weight management program. These questions mirror the information that providers who follow the Voluntary Guidelines must supply.

The brochure contains a reproducible checklist, which consumers can use to collect and compare information from different weight management programs. A Personal Health Profile Checklist is also included and allows consumers to record their health risk indicators from their weight to other health data such as blood pressure, blood cholesterol level, and blood sugar level. Consumers can use this handy checklist to discuss with their primary health care provider their risk for potential health problems because of their weight and appropriate weight management options.

To order or download a free copy of *Finding a Weight Loss Program that Works for You*, go to <http://ific.org/publications/brochures/index.cfm>. To find out more about the Partnership for Healthy Weight Management and its activities, visit <http://www.consumer.gov/weightloss/>.

“...the Partnership for Healthy Weight Management and the International Food Information Council Foundation developed a consumer brochure entitled Finding a Weight Loss Program that Works for You.”



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Food For Thought V

is the explosion of obesity-related news stories. News focused on overweight and obesity made up only 5 percent of the coverage tracked just two years earlier in 2001. *Food For Thought V* documents a more than tripling of media interest in the issue since then.

Previous *Food For Thought* surveys first began to see pronounced media attention to the issue of weight management in the 1999 survey — at that time, overweight was presented in the context of nutrition news. Still, in that study and in the following survey in 2001, concerns about overweight and obesity accounted for one in twenty of all news discussions dealing with harms and benefits linked to dietary choices. Some aspects of obesity coverage were not fully accounted for until the latest survey, when the true complexity of the issue became clear: news reports dealing with obesity as a health issue and reports mentioning such possible causes as genetics or lack of physical activity were added to the 2003 research, in order to better track what has become a multi-faceted social phenomenon.

Functional Food Reporting Gains Depth

Stories about functional foods are a prominent part of food news (11 percent) and coverage of this issue was more detailed and specific in 2003 than it has been in the past. *Food For Thought V* found that the amount of news coverage about functional foods—foods or food components that may have health benefits beyond basic nutrition — decreased in 2003 from its high in 2001, but the reporting tended to be more comprehensive in the latest research.

Early *Food For Thought* surveys found that media reports tended to focus on specific foods — soybeans,

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garlic, red wine, and others — which were said to contain functional components, or on general dietary advice such as “eat more vegetables.” Then, the 1999 and 2001 surveys found increasing discussion of specific functional components in foods — such as lutein, isoflavones, lycopene, omega-3 fatty acids, and others.

Media coverage in 2003 tended to combine these two approaches. Although many reports continued to discuss specific compounds thought to have health benefits, general dietary advice and discussions of specific foods that contain those components took on a more dominant role. This new approach to functional food news couples reports of general health benefits with more scientific information and explanation.

In 2003, 43 percent of benefit claims in the media referenced some type of functional component, compared with the 2001 high of 63 percent.

Dietary Fats Hit the Pan — Again

Eight percent of food and health media coverage in 2003 was related to dietary fats, reversing a long-term decline in fats coverage and doubling the amount of coverage from 2001.

This increase comes on the heels of changes in government regulation relating to *trans* fat, and increased attention to the functional benefits of some fatty acids.

Similar to changes in functional food coverage, reporting on dietary fats has become more detailed over the course of the *Food For Thought* surveys. Earlier surveys found that media coverage tended to focus on lowering fat intake or on the negative impact of high-fat diets. Reporting in 2003, however, was inclined to be much more complex, discussing *trans* fats, saturated fats, unsaturated fats, and omega-3 fatty acids issues.

This more detailed approach differentiates between types of dietary fats and identifies types that might actually be beneficial. In doing so, media coverage of dietary fats in 2003 showed a tendency to provide more science-based dietary advice than was evident in earlier surveys.

Where's the Perspective?

Perhaps the most consistent finding throughout the entire nine-year *Food For Thought* research period is the dearth of *context* offered in food news. Despite the literally thousands of stories that have been monitored by this study since 1995, surprisingly little concerning the

meaning of all that news has been written or broadcast. Scientific studies on food components or dietary practices are not conducted in a vacuum — they are designed to offer insight into what foods we ought to be eating. It is surprising, therefore, that the *Food For Thought* surveys observed little of the kind of information that consumers might need to make decisions about what they eat.

For example, in the 2003 study, when a food or dietary choice was linked in a news story to a specific harm or benefit, only 13 percent of the stories mentioned how

much should be eaten — or how often it should be eaten. Only 17 percent of the stories spelled out what group of consumers might benefit or be harmed from the food or dietary choice mentioned in the report. Only two percent of the food news monitored detailed the cumulative effect of a food component or dietary choice. Twenty-one percent of the news stories captured in the 2003 study cited scientific evidence as the source of the report. These percentages have varied somewhat over the 9-year course of the tracking survey, but they have remained consistently low.

When you consider that it is the context around nutrition information that makes it actionable, the absence of this kind of “background” becomes all the more important. To some extent, the explanation for this state of affairs is fairly obvious: expanding news schedules (even to a 24-hour news cycle in cable and Internet media outlets), fiercer competition among reporters for space or airtime, and in some cases, dwindling news staffs have put increasing pressure on reports to be short and succinct. Still, as the *Food For Thought* 2003 reports: a “minimal standard for context could be met in even the briefest of reports. For example, *Men's Health* offered this advice on menu planning: ‘Two to four servings of tomato sauce a week can cut your prostate cancer risk by 34 percent.’ This single sentence provides information on amount (2-4 servings) and frequency (weekly).”

If advances in food science are to have a beneficial effect on real people's lives, news consumers must be able not only to understand these advances but also to put into effect whatever dietary recommendations emerge. Food scientists, dietitians, health professionals, and journalists will face an ever more crucial challenge to translate increasingly complex emerging science into useable information. The *Food For Thought* research offers a glimpse at the communications road ahead.



Questions and Answers About BSE

Recent reports about “Mad Cow Disease” or bovine spongiform encephalopathy, (BSE), have left some people with questions about the safety of meat and dairy products. For more than a decade, the United States has had an aggressive BSE surveillance, detection, and response program. Following the first confirmed case of BSE in the United States, in December 2003 the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) initiated additional steps to enhance the current protection system. These steps include the exclusion of non-ambulatory cows from the food supply, the use of additional meat processing controls, the use of testing standards that require confirmation of a negative result for BSE before release of products, and the use of improved slaughter techniques.

To further address questions about BSE, the International Food Information Council (IFIC) offers the “Questions and Answers About BSE” fact sheet. The fact sheet has been reviewed by scientific experts, and provides answers to some basic questions about BSE. The BSE Q&A fact sheet is available on the IFIC Foundation Web site at:

<http://www.ific.org/publications/qa/bseqa.cfm>. A complimentary copy can also be obtained by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to IFIC, 1100 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 430, Washington, DC 20036. Attn: BSE Q&A.

Additional information on USDA activities and BSE can be accessed through the USDA Web site at:

<http://www.usda.gov/BSE/>.

What's New at IFIC.ORG?

Click onto <http://ific.org> regularly to find new featured information, fast facts, and links to additional IFIC Web sites like the New Nutrition Conversation with Consumers Web site for nutrition communicators (www.newconversation.org).



Kidnetic.com Gets Kids Movin' 'N' Groovin'

New Dance Game and Activity Center Added to Healthy Eating, Active Living Web Site

Are you looking for inspiration to get kids active during the winter months? Check out two new features on Kidnetic.com: the Move Mixer and The Kore!

These fun activities are designed to get kids up and moving while they surf Kidnetic.com (<http://kidnetic.com>). An interactive and educational Web site from the IFIC Foundation, it was designed to appeal to kids ages 9 to 12 and their parents to help prevent childhood overweight and obesity by promoting healthful eating and physical activity.

In the Move Mixer, kids follow a “dance leader,” and can choose routines from 10 pre-mixed dances. Kids also can create their own routines by using different dance moves and music. Kids can take the dances at their own pace, slowing down the speed when they are learning the steps and speeding it up as they increase their skills. Four types of music are available to help kids “Get out of (their) chairs and shake some air!”

The Move Mixer is one of four activities found in The Kore, a physical activity “portal” for all Kidnetic.com games. Other activities in The Kore include Wet Head Games, Scavenger Hunt, and Fitness Challenge. The Kore is meant to help kids tap into their inner “Kore” of energy.

The Kore and Move Mixer join already popular Kidnetic.com features such as Busy Buddy, Recipe Roundup, and InnerG. Kidnetic.com celebrated its first anniversary last summer and has received nearly 1.3 million visitors since its launch in June 2002.

How do you like our new look?

Email us at: foodinfo@ific.org

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 available from the IFIC Foundation.

Food Guide Pyramid: Basic Maintenance for your Body (EB-2065)

A brochure demonstrating how the USDA Food Guide Pyramid and Dietary Guidelines for Americans can be supported by nutrition messages and tips to help individuals achieve a healthy lifestyle. It covers principles of managing food choices and portions in "real life." Co-developed with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Food Marketing Institute.

Weight Loss; Finding A Weight Loss Program that Works for You (EB-2090)

This helpful, easy-to-use brochure provides information and check lists for evaluating weight loss programs and services and helps consumers ask the right questions to choose a safe and effective weight loss method.

Prevent Childhood Choking: It's Up to You! (MI-4260)

This colorful 2-sided poster in both English and Spanish is suitable for home or daycare use to help parents and caregivers take the necessary steps to prevent childhood choking on food or other objects. Developed in partnership with the National SAFE KIDS Campaign. Single copies free, multiple copies \$1.50 each.

Caffeine and Women's Health (EB-2040)

Revised and updated brochure providing current scientific facts about caffeine and women's health, including such topics as pregnancy and osteoporosis. This referenced document was developed in partnership with the Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses.

IFIC Review: Understanding Food Allergy (IR-3070)

This referenced white paper offers the latest scientific information on food allergy. It provides an overview on how to distinguish a food allergy from other sensitivities to food.

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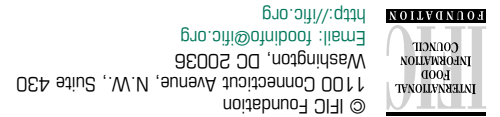
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Current Topics in Food Safety & Nutrition



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