

Book reviews

M. J. Gibney, B. M. Margetts, J. M. Kearney and L. Arab (editors). *Public Health Nutrition*. Oxford: Blackwell Science 2004. £29.95 (paperback), pp. 378. ISBN 0632056274

Public Health Nutrition is the third volume in the Nutrition Society Textbook series, comprising *Introduction to Nutrition, Nutrition and Metabolism* and *Clinical Nutrition*. This excellent text features twenty-two chapters provided by internationally respected experts. It avoids the common problems of multiauthored volumes and reads as a coherent and comprehensive overview of the field, with a consistent and easy-to-follow style.

The book begins with an overview of public health nutrition and its general objectives and approaches. This chapter and the following chapter, entitled Nutritional Epidemiology, will provide the reader with a sense of how research integrates with intervention and the evaluation of health impacts. There is a strong emphasis on cyclical programmes of information-gathering, goal-setting, action and evaluation. The chapters can be read at many levels, and individual readers can comfortably focus on the basic general messages, or get into the detailed nitty-gritty of power calculations, estimates of effect size or measurement error. These chapters will provide students with important skills in relation to reading research critically and planning and executing their own research with a greater degree of rigour.

There are five chapters that cover related themes, including approaches to the assessment of nutritional status and physical activity, public health nutrition strategies and dietary guidelines. Again, these chapters work well at many levels, and there are important basic points here relating to the limitations of different methodologies, of which all nutrition students need to be aware. Overlaid on this kind of information are detailed examples showing how the different methodologies are applied and indicating ongoing and up-to-date programmes that illustrate how public health nutrition strategies (e.g. the Baby Friendly Initiative) are used in practice.

The remaining chapters of the book focus upon specific disease processes and a lifespan approach to nutrition and health. Overnutrition and undernutrition are considered as separate problems, with an emphasis on current trends, associated pathologies and underlying causes. Three specific nutrient deficiencies (Fe, I and vitamin A) are considered in separate chapters, and these sections of the book provide an important message that many nutrition and dietetics students in the UK often miss. Although their attention is generally firmly fixed upon obesity and its sequelae as the main 'local' nutritional problem, there is a lack of focus on the much bigger global issues of under- and malnutrition. This book will hopefully help to counter this blinkered view.

The lifespan chapters are extremely useful, although not arranged in a logical sequence. The book covers nutrition in relation to child development, infant feeding, pregnancy and

nutritional programming of the fetus and therefore places a huge emphasis on the importance of nutrition in the early stages of life. This may also change students' viewpoints such that infancy and childhood will be seen as a good time to target interventions, as opposed to the later years, when major disease states are fully established. The chapter on diet and cancer is an excellent resource and manages to communicate the limitations of epidemiology as a tool for considering the cancer-preventing or cancer-causative properties of specific nutrients. It is good to see the message that the overall pattern of diet is most important in determining individual risk and the introduction of material on particular foods such as cruciferous vegetables and non-nutrient compounds as cancer-preventing agents.

Like all of the other volumes in the series, this book is very competitively priced and represents excellent value for students' money. The book will be of great use to undergraduates on BSc nutrition and related courses, to dietetics students and to students at Masters level. Personally, I will find it extremely helpful as a teaching aid for such groups and will be recommending it widely.

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DOI: 10.1079/BJN20051519

D. Klimis-Zacas and I. Wolinsky (editors). *Nutritional Concerns of Women*, 2nd ed. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press 2004. £46.99. ISBN 0 8493 1337 6

Nutritional Concerns of Women was first published in the USA in 1996, reflecting an increasing interest in women's health and nutrition issues. New chapters have been added to this second edition, and the book includes a discussion of a wide range of diet–health issues of particular importance to women, focusing mainly on issues relevant to women in the developed world. Although each of the twenty-one chapters is a separate presentation by different authors, there is reasonable consistency in the structure and approach of chapters, and, helpfully, the contents of each chapter are clearly listed at the beginning. All topics are extensively referenced, and the references have been updated since the first edition.

The opening chapters address the need for women's health research and the history of research on women's health in the USA, and summarise the major diet-related diseases faced by women in the developed world: anaemia, osteoporosis, heart

disease, non-insulin-dependent diabetes and cancer. Issues of gender and culture are then considered in a new chapter in this edition. This chapter differs from others in the book as its focus is mainly on women in the developing world. In particular, it examines how women's education and their status in society impacts on nutritional status – both their own and that of their children. The nutritional needs of women at different stages in the lifecourse are then reviewed, and adolescence, pregnancy and lactation, the menopause, and older women are each considered in separate chapters. Changing nutrient needs at different stages are discussed and related to current US dietary reference intakes. Related chapters include a review of the role of nutrients implicated in the premenstrual syndrome and a discussion of the impact of oral contraception on vitamin B₆, vitamin B₁₂ and folate status.

The second half of the book includes eight chapters that address major diet-related diseases of women in the developed world. In addition to chapters on nutritional anaemias, osteoporosis, CVD, diabetes and women's cancers, there are further chapters covering eating disorders, arthritis and rheumatic disease, and thyroid hormones in health and disease. These chapters provide useful reviews of these conditions and the nutritional issues involved, although they vary significantly in the balance of epidemiology and physiology presented – according to the disease condition, and to the evidence base supporting a role for diet and nutrition in its aetiology and prevention. For example, the new chapter on thyroid hormones focuses largely on the physiology, function and diseases of the thyroid gland, whereas the chapter on women's cancers mainly concerns the epidemiological evidence of the role of nutrition in the development of breast, cervical, endometrial and ovarian cancers.

The final four chapters consider women and weight, the nutritional concerns of recreational athletes, vegetarianism, and the nutritional issues of women in the US army. The new chapter on women and weight discusses models of obesity and the extent to which women's lives are dominated by a medical model that associates poorer health with excess body weight. It considers the advantages of a 'health-at-any-size'

model, which takes a more holistic approach to the problem of obesity and aims to promote overall health rather than weight loss. The chapter on vegetarianism reviews the adequacy of vegetarian diets at different stages of the woman's lifecourse, their association with adult disease, and healthy eating guidelines for vegetarians.

The number of topics included in the book inevitably means that the depth of discussion of each issue is rather limited, and I found the lack of detail in some chapters frustrating. However, this wide range of issues, together with the references included in each chapter, makes the book a very good starting point for further research, and there are few other comparable texts. It would be a useful resource for undergraduate students, nutritionists and interested laypeople, particularly for those in the USA. A weakness of the book, especially for the non-expert or for the less experienced researcher, is that each chapter stands alone and there is no concluding chapter that identifies common themes through the book. Linking topics across different chapters would add hugely to the book's value and would ensure that the reader got the full benefit of the wealth of information included. More importantly, the book would be greatly enhanced by the addition of a final chapter providing an overview of the information presented and setting the main nutritional issues within a wider public health context, helping the reader to understand the most important nutritional concerns of women in the developed world today.

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DOI: 10.1079/BJN20051477