

## Foreword

# Nutrition and diet for healthy lifestyles in Europe: The Eurodiet evidence

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This supplement contains the papers which have served as the basis for the development of the European guidelines for healthy diets and lifestyles, known as EURODIET. These, intended as a framework to enable the member states to develop and effectively implement their own national dietary guidelines, have been published earlier on this year<sup>1</sup>. The EURODIET initiative was commissioned by DG SANCO/G/3 (formerly DGV/F/3) within the Health Promotion Programme, which is part of the EU Community Action Programme\*, and has been co-funded by the Ministry of Health, Greece. The important policy implications of the EURODIET initiative were fully recognised by all partners involved, which included various directorates of the European Commission, representatives of relevant UN agencies (WHO and FAO), non-governmental organisations, consumers, health practitioners, agricultural producers, and food industry. Thus, great care was applied to ensure that the process leading to the guidelines would be science-based, transparent, and totally independent. A scientific Steering Committee was established, and four working groups, or Working Parties (WP1 to WP4), were created which, under the leadership of the Steering Committee, undertook to examine the four separate but inter-related facets of the issue, namely Health & Nutrients (WP1), Nutrients & Foods (WP2), Foods & People (WP3), and People & Policies (WP4). Scientific papers were commissioned to provide the state of the art in each of these areas. The entire EURODIET process and its policy conclusions and implications have been repeatedly reviewed by internal as well as external referees, and debated in encounters with representatives of all categories of stakeholders. The scientific conclusions and policy recommendations were further debated at the open consultation meeting that

took place in the Crete Conference in May 2000, and a consensus achieved following this by the Eurodiet Steering Committee.

On the whole, the papers collected in this supplement have provided a most precious guidance throughout the EURODIET process and have ensured and guaranteed its scientific basis.

The first group of papers are those that have been produced for Working Party 1, and are here displayed under the title: *European Diet and Public Health: the continuing challenge*. These 19 papers offer an updated overview of the best scientific evidence available on the causal nature of nutrient/health associations and their mechanisms, illustrate the current European burden of dietary-related diseases, evaluate the quality of the information available, weigh the strength of the evidence, and attempt, wherever possible, an evaluation of the costs. These papers cover the most serious and/or prevalent health conditions, such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, obesity, osteoporosis, iron deficiency disorders, iodine deficiency disorders, and dental caries. Other papers discuss population genetic variations and explore the influence it can have in shaping the individual's susceptibility to dietary risk factors. While recognising that genetic variations can result in different responses to specific nutrients, it is concluded that population genetic screening does not appear a viable and effective alternative. Other papers, finally, focus on specific subgroups of population, such as infants, elderly, the pregnant woman and immigrants. One paper is fully dedicated to breastfeeding, and one to the health benefits of physically active styles of life. Two other papers examine the multiple roles played by two important nutrients (selenium and folate) in human health.

The second group of papers, produced for Working Party 2, proposes rational approaches for the formulation of food-based dietary guidelines. The report of this working party highlighted the need for more scholarly derivation of food based dietary guidelines (FBDG). Recommending an increased consumption of one food

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type will necessarily have an impact on the intakes of others and to date there has been little work done in this area. A much greater understanding of the complexity of meal type and temporal patterns of food consumption will be necessary before meaningful public health nutrition advice can be given. Some of the considerations and conclusions of WP2 have been extended to more detailed papers which are published in this volume. These focus on how different methods of collecting food intake data and different standards of food composition data can influence FBDG analysis. They also look at some of the existing statistical approaches to studying food consumption patterns and how different foods are strongly correlated, both positively and negatively. Finally, they address the issue of under-reporting of energy intake which can influence either the % consumers of a given food, the reported frequency of consumption of the food or the reported serving size of the food.

The third group of papers have been produced for Working Party 3, and are here displayed under the title: '*Toward Public Health Nutrition Strategies in the European Union to implement Food Based Dietary Guidelines and to enhance healthier lifestyles*'. The remit of Working Party 3 was to identify strategies for implementing the food based dietary guidelines. Reviews have been carried out on the health impact effectiveness of various types of intervention to promote healthy eating and physical activity in the population. These conclude that the most effective interventions (a) adopt an integrated, multi-disciplinary, and comprehensive approach (b) involve a complementary range of actions, and (c) work at an individual, community, environmental and policy level. Information provision in isolation is not effective, and may exacerbate inequalities in health. The proposed strategy is based firmly on research, and on evidence for

the relative effectiveness of different types of interventions. The five papers cover some of these issues, such as the inequalities in diet and physical activity, the cost effectiveness of disease prevention strategies, and the school setting. Breastfeeding determinants are described and a suggested framework for action is given. Evidence – and theory – based promotion of health enhancing physical activity is summarised.

The evidence base points to the importance of a co-ordinated, multisectoral and population wide strategy. In order to develop and implement such strategies, identifiable structures and mechanisms will then be needed at a national level within member states. These issues were dealt with by Working Party 4<sup>1</sup>.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the many authors and the many other members and observers of the four Working Parties for their contributions to EURODIET process. We wish to pay public tribute to their willingness to take, from their busy schedule, the time necessary to promptly produce – at a shamefully short notice – the high-level scientific papers assembled in this special issue of *Public Health Nutrition*. We would like to thank also *Anthony Kafatos* and *Caroline Codrington*, University of Crete, for their excellent leadership and guidance throughout this rather complicated pan-European process and we are grateful for their invaluable mediating capacity, enthusiasm and drive. We wish to congratulate them for the outstanding results achieved, represented by the Core Report to the European Commission and the Final Reports from the Working Parties. These reports have been published in a previous special issue of *Public Health Nutrition*<sup>1</sup>.

## Reference

- 1 *Public Health Nutrition* 2001; 4: 325–336