**Controversial new dietary advice for the population of the UK**

Emeritus Professor Alan Glasper, from the University of Southampton, discusses the looming crisis caused by rising levels of obesity among the population and the controversy following the publication in May 2016 by the National Obesity Forum and Public Health Collaboration of an opinion paper entitled “*Eat Fat, Cut The Carbs and Avoid Snacking To Reverse Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes”*

**Introduction**

On the 23-6-16 the National Obesity Forum (NOF) in collaboration with Public Health Collaboration published a highly controversial document which appears to challenge the years of dietary advice by the medical establishment, of promoting the consumption of low-fat foods, something NOF considers one of the worst decisions in contemporary medicine.

[http://www.nationalobesityforum.org.uk/index.php/136-news\_/746-%E2%80%9Ceat-fat,-cut-the-carbs-and-avoid-snacking-to-reverse-obesity-and-type-2-diabetes-%E2%80%9D.html](http://www.nationalobesityforum.org.uk/index.php/136-news_/746-%E2%80%9Ceat-fat%2C-cut-the-carbs-and-avoid-snacking-to-reverse-obesity-and-type-2-diabetes-%E2%80%9D.html)

NOF is a charity founded in 2000 whose primary goal is to tackle the rising levels of obesity in the country. This charity offers training to health care professionals about how to best identify and tackle weight management issues and obesity in susceptible patients through practical and controllable lifestyle changes. Similarly the Public Health Collaboration is a non-profit organisation which aspires to support research which investigates current and urgent health issues in the UK with the aim of helping people stay healthy and to maintain healthy lifestyles in the face of potential health threats .

<https://phcuk.org/about/>

In this context Public Health Collaboration indicate that 25% of adults are obese in the UK, making it the country in Europe with the highest prevalence of obese people. Importantly the collaboration show that type 2 diabetes has risen by 65% in the past 10 years with no suggestion that these rates will decline in the foreseeable future. The cost to the NHS of managing Obesity and type 2 diabetes is now estimated to cost the NHS £16 billion a year.

**Historical background**

The link between diet and health is probably as old as mankind itself and dietary information can be found in ancient literature which predates classical civilisations. For example in the old testament of the bible, shared by people of Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths there resides not only the first record of a randomised controlled trial but also the impact of diet on countenance which is defined in the Collins dictionary as pertaining to the human face, which in turn is known to express a person’s character or mood. This physiognomy was widely regarded in the past as being indicative of good or poor health. Indeed in ancient Greek medicine ones countenance would have been assessed as part of the assessment of the “Four Humors” which were believed to be the metabolic agents of the Four Elements in the human body where the correct balance and purity of them was perceived to be essential to maintaining health.  Still today nurses assess countenance as part of an across the room assessment

<http://www.greekmedicine.net/b_p/Four_Humors.html>

Reid (2008) describes the first recorded randomised controlled trail of diet as an intervention when discussing the biblical account of the conquest of Israel by the Persian King Nebuchadnezzar. Cited within the Book of Daniel chapter 1 verses 1 through to 21, a group of captured Israeli children, some of royal blood including Daniel, later made famous in legend for surviving being thrown into a pit of lions, were ordered by the king to learn the ways of the Persians. This included being given the Kings meat and wine. Daniel however and three other Royal Israeli children, perhaps to avoid breaking the laws of Kosher requested that they be exempt from eating this Persian food. This biblical account indicates that Daniel and his companions were given permission to eat pulses instead of meat and drink water rather than wine over a ten day period with a final judgement of countenance of the two groups of boys on day 10.The bible reports that the Daniel group eating the pulses and drinking the water had a better perceived countenance than those who ate the kings meat and wine!

Since then the link between diet and health has occupied the minds of many great medical scholars with for example James Lind establishing beyond doubt that the ingestion of citrus fruit juice prevented scurvy (Harvie 2002).

However the links between diet and obesity and health is a fairly recent phenomenon as throughout most of history obesity was linked to wealth. Up until the 20th century men with a corporation or a protuberant abdomen, often exaggerated by the wearing of Prince Albert watch chains across their waist coats were seen as desirable matrimonial catches for some ladies seeking financial security.

Ill health was often attributed to a poor or deficient diet and in Ireland during the middle of the 19th century a potato famine caused the deaths of an estimated 1 million people which devastating the population of the country (Donnelly 2012) .In the late 20th century many philanthropists including the irrepressible Sir Bob Geldof fought tirelessly to address famine in the world such as that which occurred in Ethiopia. It was in December 1984 that Sir Bob cajoled the nation’s preeminent pop stars to record and release a number one hit single entitled “Do *They Know its Christmas”* with the chorus of “feed the world”

Who would have thought then that waiting in the wings of medical history was another world disaster of even greater magnitude, obesity, no longer a disease of the rich but a disease of the poor?

**Dietary advice from the National Obesity Forum**

 The primary message of this position paper is that the public need to understand that fat is not an enemy and that obesity and type 2 diabetes can be mitigated by the ingestion of more fat and less carbohydrate

First published on the 23rd May 2016 **as p**art of “Obesity and healthy eating”.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/obesity-and-healthy-eating>

this publication has resulted in much controversy causing Public Health England (PHE) to issue a response to the to the National Obesity Forum and Public Health Collaboration opinion paper

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/phe-response-to-the-national-obesity-forum-and-public-health-collaboration-opinion-paper

PHE believe that the 'Eat Fat, Cut the Carbs and Avoid Snacking To Reverse Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes' report is irresponsible and misleads the public. Their health message remains unchanged in the face of this opinion paper and they recommend that people in the UK should

* base meals on starchy carbohydrates, especially wholegrain
* eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day
* cut back on food and drink high in saturated fat, salt, sugar and calories

and that this advice will serve to reduce obesity levels and the risk of serious illnesses such as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

However it is the contention of the Obesity Forum that the prime cause of the current obesity epidemic and the increase in the incidence of type 2 diabetes is firmly linked to the food industry. The forum believe that the government should introduce legislation to curb the consumption of processed foods and drinks high in sugar content. This is because the forum deem these foods to be culpable of causing more global disease than tobacco, smoking, alcohol consumption or a lack of exercise combined. Importantly they think that the key health messages of the last decades which focus on low fat and low cholesterol are flawed and has resulted in unintended ill health consequences. Worryingly the Forum accuse the food manufacturers of having too much influence on politicians and the production of dietary guidelines which in turn has led to ramifications to the health of the nation.

The publication of this opinion paper has resulted in much media speculation with the Guardian reiterating the dangers of low fat diets.

 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/may/22/official-advice-to-eat-low-fat-diet-is-wrong-says-health-charity>

There will be readers who have followed the Atkins diet which at one time was very fashionable and named after an American cardiologist Dr Atkins who was one of the first to recommend reducing the intake of sugar and carbohydrate.

 <https://www.atkins.com/how-it-works>

Similarly in this the 3rd millennium many people follow the so called Palaeolithic diet which advocates eating the type of food hunter gathers of the Stone Age period would have eaten which would have been low in sugar and salt.

 http://thepaleodiet.com/

Similarly this new opinion paper rom the Obesity Forum is also recommending a return to the eating of whole foods i.e. meat, fish, and foods such as avocados which are known to be high in fat .The key message here is that the eating of fat does not actually make you fat or cause heart disease and with some full fat dairy foods including milk, yoghurt and cheese actually protecting the heart. Of concern to many will be the new message from the Forum that processed foods labelled “low fat”, “lite”, “low cholesterol” or “proven to lower cholesterol” should be avoided at all costs, and that patients with type 2 diabetes should now aspire to eat a fat-rich diet rather than one based on carbohydrates. The forum are critical of the latest “eat well guide published by Public Health England

Furthermore The Forum publication cites a paper by Malhotra (2013) which questions if the current guideline daily amounts (GDAs) are fit for purpose. In this paper Malhotra reports that under current guidelines a child can consume the equivalent of 22 spoonfuls of sugar, something the Forum believes in not only wrong but questions the evidence that any added sugar is necessary as a biological requirement for life.

**Key messages from the obesity forum**

 The forum presents evidence from a range of multiple randomised controlled trials which show that a higher fat, lower carbohydrate diet results in better levels of weight loss in obese people than a low-fat diet. Consistently in weight loss clinical trials it is the higher fat content diets which outperform low fat diets. The forum publication is confident in the research that it cites which shows that fat as a food induces a greater feeling of fullness when compared to the ingestion of other foods such as protein or carbohydrate. Moreover the ingestion of fat has the least effect on blood sugar levels and insulin response something which is firmly linked to type 2 diabetes. In view of this the Forum are recommending that the guidelines for weight loss in the UK should include information on the efficacy of unrefined carbohydrate and healthy high fat diets, food that does not contain processed foods but real whole foods. This they believe to be an acceptable, effective and safe approach for preventing weight gain and for promoting weight loss.

**Conclusion**

All nurses know that nutritious and appetising hospital food and drink is essential for patients when they are ill .However many of today’s patients are in hospital because of diet related obesity. Whist criticisms of hospitals food have become commonplace this new opinion paper from the Obesity Forum will place many nurse in a quandary as to what to do best for their patients. However many hospitals have already commenced a switch over to more natural food. Glasper for example (2012) reported on the partnership between the Cornish NHS Trusts and the Soil Association, which resulted in positive changes in the food served to patients in Cornish hospitals. Endorsed by the Prince of Wales, the use of locally produced organic food including fresh fish, eggs and cheese has been warmly welcomed by patients and staff alike and interestingly close to the assertions made by the Obesity Forum.

**Key points**

* The Obesity Forum has published a new position paper entitled *“Eat Fat, Cut The Carbs and Avoid Snacking To Reverse Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes”* which recommends eating more healthy fat
* The obesity Forum believes that the current advice which advises people to eat low-fat foods is one of the worst decisions in contemporary medicine.
* The new publication indicates that 25% of adults are obese in the UK, and that type 2 diabetes has risen by 65% in the past 10 years with no suggestion that these rates will decline in the foreseeable future.
* Consistently in weight loss clinical trials it is the higher fat content diets which outperform low fat diets.

**References**

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