

Diet and nutrient intake of Indigenous Australians poor

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Indigenous Australians eat more white bread, processed meat, added butter and added sugar than the average Australian, and fall well short of national fruit and vegetable recommendations, according to new research.

The study, in *Nutrition & Dietetics* published by Wiley-Blackwell, found intakes of key nutrients such as vitamins A and C, iron, fibre, niacin, magnesium and potassium were lower in urban Indigenous people, compared with the rest of the population. And intakes of protein and cholesterol were much higher.

The researchers enrolled 100 overweight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a diet and lifestyle intervention program. At the end of the 12 month program, participants were eating less kilojoules and fat, and had lost an average of 1.9kg.

‘Our study showed that diet and lifestyle programs targeted at Indigenous people can work, but it’s concerning that nutrient intakes are generally so poor to start with, particularly in this group of Australians,’ said study author and dietitian Diane Longstreet.

Before entering the program, study participants ate on average 1.4 serves of fruit and 2.2 serves of vegetables a day, which is below the Australian guidelines of two fruit and five vegetables, and is lower than the average Australian intake.

Ms Longstreet said Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in urban areas typically eat a Western-style diet, containing few traditional bush foods, and this might be linked to the high rates of chronic disease in this population.

‘Indigenous Australians have a 17 year shorter life expectancy than non-indigenous people. They are three times more likely to have diabetes and 1.5 times more likely to have heart disease. Improving access to affordable, nutrient-dense foods is urgently needed, especially in light of rising food costs,’ said Ms Longstreet.

Claire Hewat, Executive Director of the Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA), said Australia’s last national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survey showed that 29 per cent of Aboriginal people over the age of 15 worry about going without food.

‘It is a basic human right to have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. Food security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is a top priority for us, and we are working with the Public Health Association of Australia on a position statement on this issue,’ said Ms Hewat.

Source: Wiley

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