

Researchers endorse new food and nutrition guidelines

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The new Ministry of Health [Food and Nutrition Guidelines](#) released today have been endorsed by researchers at The Edgar Diabetes and Obesity Research Centre (EDOR) at the University of Otago.

"The [guidelines](#) represent a fine-tuning of earlier advice and provide a definitive set of dietary principles which are compatible with the guidelines from the WHO and other major authorities around the world," says Dr Lisa Te Morenga, a research fellow at the Centre.

"Diet is the cornerstone of preventive measures aimed at obesity and diabetes, which are our core business (as well as cancer and cardiovascular disease), and diet is also an important part of the treatment."

The updated guidelines take a more holistic approach and specifically emphasise consumption of "whole" foods or those that are minimally processed (e.g. fruit, vegetables, meat, nuts, seeds, legumes, unsaturated oils), over highly processed options such as [white bread](#), white rice, pasta, baked goods and sweets.

"This means that a wide variety of acceptable diets are actually possible when following these guidelines" says EDOR co-director Associate Professor Rachael Taylor.

"This is really helpful for the public who are constantly bombarded with information - much of it incorrect – about certain diets being better (or

worse) than others" says Associate Professor Taylor.

A major clarification in the new guidelines is that there is no need to restrict overall carbohydrate, encouraging plenty of legumes, wholegrains and high fibre foods. However, the new guidelines do specifically recommend replacing highly processed carbohydrates, such as white bread, with healthier wholegrain options.

"This is very different from an earlier version of the guidelines in which all starchy carbohydrates were encouraged" says Associate Professor Taylor, "and is particularly relevant to those with diabetes and obesity".

There are also some subtle differences regarding fat intake. Instead of focusing on reduction of total fat, the emphasis is on reducing saturated fats (butter, meat fat, dairy products) and replacing them with unsaturated fats, especially polyunsaturated fats. For example, replacing butter with olive oil.

"However, people still need to remember that fat is an important source of energy, and eat appropriate to their energy needs" says Associate Professor Taylor.

Importantly the guidelines remind consumers to think about the whole package when it comes to choosing foods; for example, there is little health benefit in choosing low- fat foods that are high in refined grains, sugar and salt.

"All we need now are the appropriate environmental changes to allow people to implement these guidelines more easily" says Dr Te Morenga.

"We are far more likely to be successful in encouraging healthy eating if it is easier for consumers to recognise and choose the healthiest foods, rather than the highly processed foods high in saturated fat, sugar and

salt which dominate the marketplace".

"Widespread adoption of the health star rating system will help, as will actions that discourage unhealthy food choices such as limiting the marketing of unhealthy foods and drinks to children, the implementation of healthy [food](#) policies in schools, workplaces and public institutions and even sugary drink taxes."

Provided by University of Otago

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