

The Editor
Lancet

Dear Editor,

Re: "Free Sugar and Human Health: Sufficient evidence for action?"

The International Union of Nutritional Sciences supports the observations of Professor Mann on this important issue. It recognizes the growing body of scientific evidence which demonstrates the critical importance of energy density (whether determined by one or several macronutrients, but at least certain fats and carbohydrates) in relation to energy imbalance and, therefore, the risk of obesity, with its attendant risk of diabetes, cardiovascular disease and other so-called "chronic" disorders or diseases. At the same time, the IUNS would encourage increasing use of the preferred clinical and physiological terminology for carbohydrates recommended in the Joint FAO/WHO consultation on Carbohydrates (FAO Food and Nutrition paper 66; Geneva, WHO 1998)¹ which discourages the use of ambiguous descriptors like "Complex Carbohydrates" which may refer to the carbohydrate food matrix or carbohydrate chemistry or both. A food-based approach to carbohydrate (and fat) nutrition, again recommended by WHO & FAO², would avoid the present pre-occupation with nutrients rather than the food from which they ought to come. For example, the case for fruits and vegetables rather than the case for "complex carbohydrates" instead of "free sugars" is much more coherent and pragmatic.

References:

1. Asp N-G, Cummings J, Diaz Bustos EO, Dreher M, Gurjar M, Kimiagar SM, Kobayashi S, Lineback D, Mann JI, Oniang'o R, Hill J, Tontisirin K, Vorster HH, Stephen A, Wahlqvist M, Wolever T and FAO-WHO Consultants. Carbohydrates in human nutrition. Report of a Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation, Rome, 14-18 April 1997. Rome: Food & Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1998. (www.fao.org/docrep/W8079E/W8079E00.htm)
2. World Health Organization (Member: ML Wahlqvist). Preparation and use of food-based dietary guidelines. Report of a Joint FAO/WHO Consultation (1995: Nicosia, Cyprus). Geneva: World Health Organization, 1998.

Mark L. Wahlqvist
President, International Union of Nutritional Sciences
Asia Pacific Health & Nutrition Centre, Monash University
Melbourne, Victoria 3800