

Nutrition guidelines for dental care vs the evidence: is there a disconnect?—a response

Harriette Carr

The Ministry of Health considers that parts of the summary provided by the authors¹ includes an incorrect interpretation of New Zealand's dietary guideline advice, and a misrepresentation of the overall recommended eating pattern for New Zealanders.

The Ministry of Health's core dietary guidelines, the Eating and Activity Guidelines (EAGs) recommend a healthy eating pattern that is high in vegetables and fruit; includes whole grain cereals; low-fat milk products; legumes and nuts; fish and other seafood; and unsaturated oils. This eating pattern is low in processed meats, saturated fat, sodium (salt) and sugar-sweetened foods and drinks. A large body of evidence shows that this way of eating is associated with a lower risk of heart disease, stroke and other health conditions. The EAGs recommend choosing mainly whole and less processed foods to support the adoption of the healthy eating pattern described above.

The EAGs were published in 2015 and primarily focus on adult New Zealanders between 19–64 years. The eating pattern described above is generally considered the Ministry's basis for healthy eating advice for all population groups from two years of age and beyond. The Ministry is now going

through a process to transition its population-specific dietary guidelines into the EAG series.

The Ministry continues to recommend that those over two years of age choose low-fat dairy options. There is evidence that some forms of saturated fat, from some dairy sources in particular, may be less harmful than previously thought. When this is considered within the total body of evidence on saturated fat though, healthy eating advice remains to choose unsaturated fats over saturated fats where possible, along with the other aspects of a healthy eating pattern as identified above.

The influence of diet on oral health is always considered during the Ministry's guidelines development process, and the Ministry's Oral Health Team is involved in the review process.

Prevention of tooth decay involves a combination of the following:

- brushing your child's teeth twice a day with regular-strength fluoride toothpaste
- ensuring that your child has a healthy diet that is low in sugar
- ensuring that your child has regular dental check-ups from an early age.

Competing interests:

Nil.

Author information:

Harriette Carr, Deputy Director of Public Health, Ministry of Health.

Corresponding author:

Dr Harriette Carr, Deputy Director of Public Health, Ministry of Health.

harriette.carr@health.govt.nz

URL:

www.nzma.org.nz/journal-articles/nutrition-guidelines-for-dental-care-vs-the-evidence-is-there-a-disconnect-a-response

REFERENCES:

1. Hancock S, Zinn C, Schofield G, Thornley S. Nutrition guidelines for dental care vs the evidence: is there a disconnect? NZMJ 2020; 133(1509):65–72.