Healthcare Professionals Agree:

Dietary Guidance Needs to be Balanced, Practical, Affordable and Achievable

Introduction

When it comes to dietary guidance and nutrition advice, education and balance trump restriction and avoidance. People are hungry to build a healthful lifestyle that accounts for individual and cultural preferences, yet they also crave the enjoyment and pleasure they get from the foods they love.

A recent survey of healthcare professionals, including registered dietitians, nurse practitioners and physician assistants, commissioned by the Back to Balance Coalition, found that the majority of healthcare professionals support practical, balanced dietary guidance that gives people what they want: understanding of ‘how to’ build a healthy diet that also allows for taste and satisfaction.¹

Balanced Advice is Superior to Restrictive Approaches

Leading health and nutrition organizations, including the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics,² as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)³ support an ‘all foods fit’ approach. Key elements of a total diet approach include a wide variety of foods, moderation with appropriate portion sizes and regular physical activity. Nearly all healthcare professionals surveyed agree with these organizations regarding the importance of balance in food selection.

Dietary Guidance Should be Practical, Achievable and Non-Restrictive

The notion that dietary advice needs to be approachable and based on individual and cultural preferences is one that more than ninety percent of healthcare professionals support. Guidance that emphasizes a range of food choices is better than a restrictive approach that limits specific foods, and ninety-two percent believe that people find prescriptive dietary recommendations, such as ‘eat this’ or ‘don’t eat that,’ to be restrictive and often frustrating—which can lead to non-compliance. Nearly all healthcare professionals agree that advice needs to be approachable and practical, with ‘how to’ advice being more effective than limiting an individual’s choices by telling them not to eat foods they enjoy.

Nearly all (94%) health professionals agree providing practical ‘how to’ advice is more effective than limiting my client’s choices by telling them not to eat foods they enjoy.

To be successful in the long-term, my advice to clients/patients needs to be approachable, and based on what can work for them as individuals.
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More than three-fourths (78%) of health professionals believe that an approach based in balanced, moderate consumption of a wide variety of foods would be the most effective for providing dietary guidance to the public.

Hearing about both of these approaches - one based in restricted access to foods that have been classified as "bad" and the other based on balanced, moderate consumption of a wide variety of foods. Which approach would be the most effective for providing dietary guidance to the public?

78% 22%

Dietary Guidance Needs to Account for Choice and Individual Preference

Ninety-six percent of healthcare professionals surveyed agree that dietary recommendations must consider factors such as individual taste and cultural preferences in order to help people understand how to achieve a healthy, balanced diet that includes foods they enjoy. In fact, more than half (54%) of healthcare professionals believe that public policy that restricts certain foods, or classifies some foods as “bad,” is not an effective way to improve health and nutrition. Ninety-five percent of healthcare professionals agree that empowering choice is more effective than restriction and that dietary guidance should be practical, affordable and achievable.

Additionally, healthcare professionals believe they must account for a range of external personal factors and preferences when counseling patients on food choice. The top six factors that the majority (at least 81%) of healthcare professionals take into consideration when counseling patients on food choices are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors for Consideration During Counseling</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility of food</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordability of food</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste preferences</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural preferences</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking/preparation skills and tools</td>
<td>81%</td>
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Conclusion

While food and nutrition guidance will always evolve, the constant factor that continues to garner universal support is the role of balance in a healthy lifestyle. Empowering choice and personal responsibility in today’s consumer and providing them with useful tools including dietary advice that is realistic, practical, affordable and achievable (versus restrictive), enables them to make choices that work for their lifestyle.

About the Back to Balance Coalition

The Back to Balance Coalition brings together food and beverage organizations, health advocacy groups, and nutrition professionals who are supporters of balance, variety and moderation in dietary guidance. The group aims to bring forward common sense, practicality, economic, and cultural relevance into federal Dietary Guidelines. Visit http://www.bk2balance.org/ for more information and complimentary educational resources.

References

1 Back to Balance Coalition HP Survey: Research was conducted on-line between October 16 and October 22, 2014 among 300 health professionals using Op4G’s unique database of highly qualified leaders and engaged members who have agreed to participate in internet-based research. The research sample has a margin of error of +/- 5.6%


3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Healthy Weight: http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy_eating/