

National Nutrition Summit 2000 – Planning for the 21st Century

Looking back over 30 years and forward to the next 30, the government sets priorities to address the nation's nutrition.

If you read nutrition labels at the supermarket, have seen or used the Food Guide Pyramid or heard about changes in federal food assistance programs like WIC, school lunches and food stamps, you're already familiar with some of the progress the U.S. has made in addressing food and nutrition issues in America over the past three decades. Yet, despite the positive progress made, the majority of Americans today have unhealthy diets and more sedentary lifestyles.

On May 30 – 31, 2000, the USDA and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) jointly sponsored a National Nutrition Summit (NNS) to highlight progress made over the past 31 years since a 1969 White House Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health and to identify future challenges and opportunities for the nation regarding food, nutrition and health.

In the two-day conference in Washington, D.C., special attention was given to the continuing problem of hunger, the increasing prevalence of obesity, and the role of nutrition and physical activity in health promotion programs and interventions. The Summit provided a forum to focus on major public health issues and work toward developing substantive approaches, programs and policies to address them.

Summit sessions covered the topics of nutrition and physical activity throughout various phases of the lifespan from infants to the elderly with a special consideration paid to the aging population that is growing at an extraordinary rate in the U.S. Other sessions focused on the face of hunger in the United States today.

Obesity in the U.S.

With the increasing prevalence of obesity in the U.S. – what many consider to be a crisis for young and old alike - several sessions hosted discussions on the relationship of various factors to obesity and overweight.

Factors including lack of physical activity, social and physical environmental factors, the influence of the family, school, and worksite, the state of health care and the influence of media were addressed in respect to obesity problem in the U.S.

Along with poor dietary habits, obesity contributes to four of the leading causes of death in the U.S.: heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes.

New Initiatives Announced on Nutrition and Health.

In addition to the discussion sessions, several initiatives were announced at the National Nutrition Summit aimed at addressing some of the major public health problems in the U.S. today.

It was at the NNS in May that the *2000 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* were first revealed by the Clinton Administration bringing together 10 objectives into the “ABCs for Better Health.”

In response to the increasing prevalence of obesity in children, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released new pediatric growth charts at the NNS. The new charts include Body Mass Index (BMI) and are revised to better reflect the cultural and racial diversity of America’s children.

The CDC also announced funding of \$1.6 million to support state-based nutrition and physical activity programs designed to prevent obesity and obesity-related diseases as well as a program to help schools create safe walking routes to school as a way to encourage physical activity among children.

With the multi-billion dollar weight loss industry resulting in large part from the growing problem of obesity in the U.S., the USDA launched the start of a *Coordinated Nutrition Research Program on Popular Diets* in order to begin to research popular diets. Because of the lack of sound-scientific information on popular diets, the government is initiating this program to first evaluate the two most popular diets currently – the low-carbohydrate diet and the very-low fat diet. Research protocols are being developed and studies will be carried out beginning next year.

New Resources on Nutrition Launched at the Summit.

In preparation for the NNS, the National Library of Medicine has put together a 5,498-citation bibliography that provides an overview and background of the broad subject of the nation’s food security, nutrition and health issues since 1970. The bibliography is available on the Internet at the National Library of Medicine’s site and is entitled *National Nutrition Summit: Information Resources*.

Nutrition plays a critical role in the health and wellness of all Americans and the nation’s state of public health. The NNS provided a valuable opportunity for experts to come together to evaluate current public health problems and to reevaluate and develop approaches to set the nutrition policy agenda for the 21st century.

References:

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