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Institute
for dairy nutrition and health

Publication on healthy and sustainable diets

Due to a growing world population and increasing prosperity, the demand for good nutrition that provides an optimal intake of nutrients with a low impact on the environment is growing. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the global food production should increase by 70% between 2009 and 2050 in order to be able to meet the demand for food in 2050. Feeding the growing world population in a responsible way requires sustainable and healthy nutrition. In other words: a sustainable diet.



Sustainable diet

A sustainable diet provides sufficient nutrients and energy with a low impact on the environment. Apart from this, the food is available, affordable and fits in with the eating habits of the population. (1)

Roles of parties

Science

Scientists go into the question of what a sustainable diet may look like. This question is not easy to answer, as measuring the environmental impact of a foodstuff or product group involves more than just the CO₂ emission for the production of this foodstuff. The (re)use of natural resources for the production of food, such as water, soil, minerals and biodiversity is to be taken into account as well when determining the sustainability level. Of course, optimum efficiency in the use of resources within the production chain and reduction of the amount of waste are important. (2)

Dietitian

Simply replacing products with more sustainable variants is not the solution. Practice shows that replacement of one product (group) often changes the nutrient intake. The challenge lies in keeping food valuable from a dietary point of view with minimum environmental impact. (2) Currently, nutritional recommendations which follow The Eatwell Guide (Public Health England) are the best option. Reducing consumption of food and drinks with of a low nutritional value, reducing the intake of red meat and to consume two to three servings of milk(products) a day are changes that are likely to have the most impact on making a diet more sustainable. (3)

Consumer

Consumers are increasingly aware of sustainability. The consumer tries to pay more attention to sustainability

by separating waste or by recycling, by using less energy through, for instance, using low-energy light bulbs, by consuming less and by creating a minimum amount of waste. (4) For consumers there are a few practical tips with respect to food: do not eat more than you need and choose products that have undergone minimum processing, such as vegetables, fruit, legumes, milk (products) and whole-meal grain products. The body does not need any extras, such as confectionary and snacks, and these food products provide less nutrients. (5) Disposing of things is a waste: therefore wasting less food is an important step towards a more sustainable household. (3)



The role of dairy

According to the FAO, dairy can play an important role in providing the growing world population with sufficient food and nutrients (6). In the UK two to three servings of milk (products) are part of a healthy diet for adults in the recommendations shown in The Eatwell Guide (5). Within the food pattern, dairy makes an important contribution to the intake of protein, vitamins B2 and B12, and calcium. Besides, dairy offers minerals like phosphorus, potassium, magnesium and zinc. By the way, did you know that, milk and milk products provide about 35-45% of the daily intake for calcium and 33-35% for vitamin B12? (7-8) This makes dairy important for healthy nutrition, a common element in the food pattern, affordable and readily available. Additionally, the dairy sector is working hard on making the dairy chain more sustainable.

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