

# Books

## ***Metabolic Consequences of Changing Dietary Patterns***

Vol. 79. World Review Of Nutrition and Dietetics. Edited by A P Simopoulos. Pp. xv + 226. SwFr 254/DM 304/US\$ 221. Basel: Karger. 1996. ISBN 3-8055-6296-9.

It is well known that the dietary patterns of populations in transition change, and that this change is associated with new patterns of health and disease.

The contributions by international experts to this book provide a comprehensive and enlightening review of the changes that have occurred in the traditional diets of the Australian Aborigines, the adult Melbourne Chinese, various South African populations, the Koreans and the Chinese.

In Korea, rapid industrialisation has led to the replacement of traditional foods with western-style fast foods to a large extent. Although Chinese tradition requires that 'breakfast should be eaten well, lunch must be in one's fill, and food for dinner should be little', there has lately been a neglect of breakfast, whereas the use of fast foods and large dinners has become the trend.

In the Australian Aboriginal population and in South Africa, the consequences of shifts from the hunter-gatherer dietary pattern to a more 'western' diet are described as both positive and negative. Among the advantages are a decrease in infant mortality rate, an increase in life expectancy, as well as a decrease in the prevalence of protein energy malnutrition, gastro-enteritis and birth rate. On the negative side, however, there is an increase in the incidence and prevalence of diseases of a more 'western' lifestyle, i.e. obesity, non-insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus, hypertension, cancer, and cardiovascular disease.

The Aboriginal people have demonstrated that the hunter-gatherer dietary pattern can be incorporated into a contemporary 'western' lifestyle, at least in the shortterm; from the public health point of view, this happy marriage may hold promise for alleviating the difficulties associated with transition. Unlike the Aboriginal people, however, there would appear to be little hope for a return to traditional diets in African populations in South Africa.

Another interesting feature of the book is the extensive data on the worldwide consumption and the composition of tea and coffee. This is followed by an in-depth evaluation of the available evidence regarding the role of coffee and tea in the prevention and initiation of carcinogenesis. Based on epidemiological and animal studies, it seems that tea consumption may have beneficial effects on certain cancers. In the case of coffee, it is concluded that there is insufficient evidence for a genotoxic, mutagenic or carcinogenic effect, if it is consumed in amounts of approximately 2 to 4 cups per day. Indeed, the authors suggest that coffee may delay the onset of certain tumours, and that the antitumour effect of certain chemotherapeutic agents may be potentiated by high dosages of caffeine.

This useful and well-presented book will make easy and very interesting reading to dietitians, nutritionists, epidemiologists, health personnel and scientists, and it provides a number of ideas for further research.

**M G Herselman**