



Doctors For Nutrition welcomes the 2019 EAT–Lancet report on healthy diets from sustainable food systems

Doctors For Nutrition Position Statement • January 2019

The [EAT–Lancet Commission](#) report released in January 2019 lays out a pathway of targets and recommendations for a global shift toward a plant-based eating pattern in order to meet global nutrition needs while remaining within planetary boundaries. Doctors For Nutrition supports this message as an urgent imperative for improving population and planetary health.

Doctors For Nutrition is an Australasian health promotion charity led by medical and dietetic professionals from across Australia, New Zealand and globally. Our vision is a society and healthcare system that embraces nutrition solutions to help people optimise their health & quality of life. More information is available at doctorsfornutrition.org.

[Doctors For Nutrition](#) welcomes the release of the [EAT–Lancet Commission's report on healthy diets from sustainable food systems](#). This major report is a partnership between the global non–profit EAT Foundation and one of the world's leading medical journals in collaboration with nutrition, health, sustainability and policy researchers. The report outlines how to achieve healthy and sustainable eating patterns for an estimated global population of 10 billion people by 2050, and is the product of three years of work by nearly 40 international experts from across a range of scientific disciplines.

According to the authors, more than 820 million people do not have enough food to eat, while many more consume diets that *“contribute to a substantial rise in the incidence of diet-related obesity and non-communicable diseases, including coronary heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.”* Furthermore, unhealthy diets are considered to be the leading risk factor for disease worldwide and *“pose a greater risk to morbidity and mortality than does unsafe sex, and alcohol, drug, and tobacco use combined.”*

The Commission also recognises that the current global food system is among the largest drivers of environmental degradation and transgression of planetary



resource limits. The way we produce food contributes significantly to climate change, biodiversity loss, freshwater use, land-system change and interference with global nitrogen and phosphorus cycles.

According to the Commission, *"It will be impossible to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals or the Paris Climate Agreement without a radical transformation of the global food system."*

The EAT-Lancet Commission's 'Planetary Health Diet'

Given that our current global food system has detrimental effects on both human and planetary health, the report's main goal is to deliver specific targets based on rigorous scientific evidence around ideal quantities of key foods for human consumption.

Livestock rearing, as compared to other forms of agricultural production, is known to be particularly negatively impactful on both the climate and the environment. As such, the report emphasises the need to greatly reduce, if not eliminate, both red and processed meat intake. Findings also stress the importance of consuming a much greater quantity of whole, plant-based foods (i.e. fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, nuts and seeds) which are not only healthier but significantly more environmentally-friendly.

More specifically, according to the report, to more sustainably orientate our food systems, global consumption of fruits, vegetables, nuts and legumes will need to double. Consumption of red meat and refined sugar will have to be reduced by more than 50% on a global scale, mainly by lowering intake in wealthier countries.

The graphic below summarises eating pattern recommendations from the Commission – collectively termed the 'Planetary Health Diet' – which the authors estimate could prevent around 11 million deaths per year on a global scale.



Figure 1: The planetary health plate, from the EAT-Lancet Commission Summary Report

Key recommendations of the Planetary Health Diet:

- At least five servings of vegetables and fruit (500g) daily
- At least 75g of legumes (beans, peas, lentils) and 50g of nuts daily
- 232g of whole grains and 50g (possible range 0–100g) of tubers or starchy vegetables daily



- 50g (possible range 20–80g) of unsaturated oils daily, mainly from plant sources
- **No more than 14 grams of red meat daily, if any** (pork, beef, and lamb)
- No more than 29 grams of poultry and 28 grams of fish daily
- No more than 13 grams of egg daily (~1/4 of a medium-sized egg)
- Moderate intake of **dairy** (~250 grams, equivalent to about a cup of milk) is **optional** on a daily basis
- Less than 5% of total energy intake from sugars.

According to the authors, their healthy reference diet *“largely consists of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and unsaturated oils, includes a low to moderate amount of seafood and poultry, and includes no or a low quantity of red meat, processed meat, added sugar, refined grains, and starchy vegetables.”*

The report further calls for at least a 50% reduction in food losses (from production methods) and food waste (from consumption habits), in part via public policies and education. This is deemed essential for the global food system to remain within a safe operating space.

Where does Doctors For Nutrition stand on EAT-Lancet?

Doctors For Nutrition applauds the report’s overall purpose and intent, as well as its appreciation of the implications of eating pattern choices for both personal and planetary health. We also appreciate the fact that the Planetary Health Diet recommends strictly limiting, if not eliminating, both red and processed meat intake, minimising intake of poultry and fish, and significantly reducing both sugar and processed food consumption. The report explicitly showcases the benefits of plant-based eating and encourages people to move in this direction on a global scale. This is a welcome and much-needed development in dietary messaging.

Doctors For Nutrition does however, question the Commission’s decision to place fairly strict limits on the recommended daily intake of starchy vegetables (e.g. potato, sweet potato, yam, cassava, winter squashes, pumpkin, peas, parsnip)



within the Planetary Health Diet: just 50 grams of these foods per day (the equivalent of less than half of a small potato) is recommended.

At least part of the Commission's justification for doing so appears to stem from the fact that their guidelines are global in nature, thereby calling for recommendations that are responsive to major global trends. According to the EAT-Lancet report itself, in considering the main sources of carbohydrate consumed around the world, grains are the most common, and are further known to offer significant health benefits:

"Grains are the largest source of energy in almost all diets worldwide. High intake of whole grains and fibre from grain sources has been associated with reduced risk of coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and overall mortality."

It appears, therefore, that the Commission has emphasised grain intake in place of starchy vegetables within the Planetary Health Diet, with the recommendation being that people consume 232 grams of whole grains per day.

The report further states that daily consumption of potatoes (one of the most commonly consumed starchy vegetables worldwide) has been linked with common chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes. The limited number of studies from Western populations that are cited within the report, and on which this information is based, certainly emphasise the detrimental effects of potato that is consumed in an unhealthy form (e.g. as french-fries or potato chips). These studies point out that greater 'total potato intake' was also associated with increased diabetes risk, but acknowledge a failure to account for unhealthy condiments or additives that may have accompanied potatoes themselves.

One of the mechanisms by which potatoes are posited to influence diabetes risk within these studies is via their relatively high glycaemic index, or GI (a measure that reflects how a single serving of a particular food affects concentrations of glucose, or blood sugar, in the human body in the period after consumption). It is important to know, however, that cohort studies have not consistently found a relationship between dietary glycemic index and diabetes risk. Furthermore, it has not been established that glycemic response or 'load' is a cause of diabetes.

Importantly, observational research has found that eating patterns generally high in vegetables and fruits (including vegetarian and vegan eating patterns) are associated with a large (~40%) risk reduction for type 2 diabetes. Reasons for this might include the fact that plant-based diets are associated with a lower body



mass index and that they are further associated with less saturated fat intake (which is known to improve insulin sensitivity) as compared with omnivorous dietary patterns. Many of the foods regularly consumed by plant-based eaters, including a variety of vegetables, legumes, grains, and nuts, are known to lower diabetes risk.

It is Doctors For Nutrition's position that strict limits should **not** be placed on the intake of starchy vegetables when these are consumed in their whole and unprocessed form (and without the addition of unhealthy fats or highly processed additives).

The EAT–Lancet Commission report further recommends 50 grams per day of total added fat within the Planetary Health Diet, *“emphasising predominantly plant oils.”*

Doctors For Nutrition agrees with the Commission that plant oils low in saturated fats are a prudent alternative to animal fats, both for personal and planetary health. We as an organisation would like to emphasise however, that the optimal alternative is simply to replace all oils with whole plant-based foods. Oils and other added processed fats are **not** a dietary requirement (they are essentially an empty source of energy). Dietary fat is available in sufficient quantity from unprocessed plant foods, as are other macronutrients. Our position is that plant oils are no more nutritionally valuable than are added sugars.

We note that the epidemiological and experimental evidence cited by the Commission in support of the incorporation of plant oils in the Planetary Health Diet is based on the replacement of animal fats with plant oils, rather than on the addition of plant oils to a diet that already excludes animal fats. Therefore, this data would appear to provide evidence for the extent of the deleterious effects of the saturated fat found in animal fats; it does not provide evidence that plant oils are health promoting per se. One of the supporting studies for this recommendation as cited by the Commission, is the PREDIMED study, which was recently retracted and revised. Furthermore, this study has either been omitted from – or deemed to have serious risk of bias – by several systematic reviews and guidelines.

The whole food plant-based diet recommended by Doctors For Nutrition does not include isolated plant oils.



Doctors for Nutrition recommends a diet which centres on the consumption of whole fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and beans and legumes, with other whole or minimally processed plant-based foods added as occasional condiments.

Concluding remarks

The authors of the EAT-Lancet Commission report indicate that a combination of measures overall are required to address the huge environmental problems faced by our planet, and integrated policies aimed at implementing global food system transformation will be a crucial part of this effort.

Importantly, the Commission also recognises that achieving its recommendations will depend on the wide-scale provision of, “high-quality primary health care that integrates family planning and education on healthy diets.”

The targets and recommendations provided within the EAT-Lancet report lay out a pathway for the necessary global shift toward a plant-based eating pattern, and Doctors For Nutrition supports the move in this direction.

Doctors For Nutrition fully supports and strives to promote the enormous potential of whole food plant-based eating patterns to improve both population and planetary health.