TRACK 4: HEALTH AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

T4:PL Lifestyle changes and body weight control: How much do we need to change?

LIFESTYLE CHANGES AND BODY WEIGHT CONTROL: HOW MUCH DO WE NEED TO CHANGE?

Wim H.M. Saris
Dept of Human Biology, Nutrition and Toxicology Research Institute. NUTRIM, University of Maastricht, Maastricht, The Netherlands.

While susceptibility to obesity is determined largely by genetic factors, the current obesity epidemic is significantly influenced by adverse lifestyle factors. Given our genetic background, it is essentially infeasible for humans to self-regulate food intake under current environmental circumstances. So far, health guidelines have focused on changing two particular lifestyles factors: increase the levels of physical activity and reduce the intake of fat and sugar. The urgency for public action to increase physical activity is generally accepted, but the level of being physically active for 30 minutes a day, currently promoted, is most probably not sufficient to prevent weight gain and certainly not for weight regain. The few well-controlled prospective studies showed a preventive weight (re)-gain effect of 60 to 90 minutes of moderate activity. On the energy intake side of the energy balance, there is much more debate. Although a number of meta-analyses on the relationship between fat intake and body weight control clearly showed a direct association, the scientific evidence has been seriously challenged in recent years. These doubts have dramatically posed the question as to whether we should focus explicitly on energy density or more on the macronutrient composition. The challenge is to reduce the daily energy intake without compromising the consumer liking too much. It is suggested that we should aim for a 15 to 50 kcal day reduction in energy intake, given a reasonable level of physical activity.