



Health and Welfare  
Canada

Santé et Bien-être social  
Canada

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Your file    Votre référence

Our file    Notre référence

Professor Ancel Keys,  
Laboratory of Physiological Hygiene,  
University of Minnesota,  
Minneapolis, Minnesota  
U.S.A.

Dear Dr. Keys:

An Editorial in the American Heart Journal a few months ago (April, 1980) claimed that relatively low rates of coronary heart disease reported for Eskimos, Masai and Frenchmen were proof against linking high saturated fat diets to high serum cholesterol levels and high rates of coronary heart disease as these peoples consumed diets high in saturated fats.

Having worked and lived with various groups of Eskimos in the Canadian Eastern and Western Arctic in the early and mid 1950ies (i.e., before DEW-line construction and massive school and settlement building program changed radically their lifestyle and diet) and studied them since then (see enclosed Xerox copy of a recently published paper - reprints not yet received), I felt compelled to contradict the popular misconception about Eskimos being big fat eaters, and to protest their continued use as false witnesses by the meat and dairy fat lobby.

Detailed food consumption studies in the Canadian Arctic, Alaska and Greenland have found the relative contribution by fat of any kind (from native plus imported sources) was lower not higher than that prevailing in the average North American diet in the mid 1950ies (see enclosed Table III from Dietary Habits and Nutritional Base of Native Populations of the Northwest Territories, by Otto Schaefer, M.D. & Jean Steckle, Ph.D. - a monograph commissioned by Science Advisory Board, N.W.T. in Press).

These studies also show that fat intakes were lower in groups studied earlier and living and eating more traditionally and had a tendency to increase with time and acculturation.

Furthermore their traditional diet was not rich in saturated fats but relatively rich in long-chain unsaturated fatty acids as elucidated by various workers referred to in my enclosed letter to the Editor.

I have been irritated by the persistence with which critics of the pioneering work done by you, Jeremiah Stamler and others misuse Eskimos as false witnesses despite the above referred to research. You - no doubt - encounter even more such arguments in discussions and I thought that you would therefore be interested to have references on hand to disprove these superficial misconceptions about Eskimos and their diet.

A recent survey of two Eskimo populations at different stages of acculturation (see enclosed Xerox copy - reprints did not arrive yet) revealed indeed a marked increase of obesity, serum cholesterol levels, gallbladder disease and aortic indices in the more acculturated group, living predominately imported food on a diet quite similar to that eaten by most North Americans.

Although admittedly many other factors changed too, in particular physical activity, dietary changes must be suspected to have much contributed to recorded changes and differences in these two populations whom I also examined in the 1950ies, <sup>when I</sup> and found them quite similar.

It would be most unfortunate if the recent publicity given in the Media to similar ill-founded pronouncements as that by Oster about the "faltering diet - heart - cholesterol hypothesis" would halt or even reverse the healthy change in eating habits of North Americans you, Stamler and others induced, and which at least in part may be responsible for the decline in cardiovascular mortality noted during the last years.

Yours sincerely,



O. Schaefer, M.D., FRCP(C)

OS/ms  
Encl.

cc: Professor Jeremiah Stamler