

Food Standards Agency (see note below)

Alison Tedstone

On 1st October 2010 responsibilities for nutrition in England were transferred to the Department of Health, where Alison Tedstone and the work she describes is now based.

Expert advice, dietary surveys and nutrition research

The Food Standards Agency is a non-ministerial government department that aims to improve food safety and the balance of people's diets. Evidence underpins activity, policy making and to inform consumers.

The theme of health eating is supported by independent advice and evidence including:

The Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN)

SACN is an independent committee of experts set up to advise the Agency and UK Departments of Health, as well as other Government Agencies and Departments, on scientific aspects of nutrition and health. Its remit includes: nutrient content of individual foods and advice on diet as a whole including the definition of a balanced diet, and the nutritional status of people; monitoring and surveillance; nutritional issues, which affect wider public health policy issues including conditions where nutritional status is one of a number of risk factors (e.g. cardiovascular disease, cancer, osteoporosis and/or obesity); nutrition of vulnerable groups (e.g. infants and the elderly) and inequality issues. Its remit is limited to scientific elements of risk assessment and does not include risk management.

Information on SACN's remit and work programme can be found at:

<http://www.sacn.gov.uk/index.html>

Nutrition surveys and food analysis

Dietary surveys together with information on the nutrient content of foods, enable the monitoring of food consumption, nutrient intake and nutritional status; development and evaluation of nutrition policy; assessment of exposure to food chemicals; planning nutrition research; and targeting public education campaigns and material on healthy eating. The main focus is the National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS) programme, together with nutrient analysis in support of the NDNS. NDNS was until 2000/1 a series of discreet cross sectional nutrition surveys of population subgroups. In order to track trends better, to give greater flexibility, and to be able to respond more quickly to changing policy needs, the NDNS has now moved to a rolling programme of surveys which collect data continuously on a UK representative sample of adults and children. The first wave of data from the new survey was published in 2010.

The Agency also undertakes *ad hoc* dietary surveys. These have included the Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey (LIDNS) in 2007. The survey provided detailed nationally representative data on the dietary habits and nutritional status of the low income and materially deprived population and the

factors affecting these. Information on the LIDNS and its findings can be found at:

<http://www.food.gov.uk/science/dietarysurveys/lidnsbranch/>

An *ad hoc* survey currently underway is the Diet and Nutrition Survey of Infants and Young Children (DNSIYC) which is intended to bridge the gap in data between the age groups covered by the Infant Feeding Survey (led by Department of Health) and the NDNS. It aims to provide detailed information on the food and nutrients consumed by a representative sample of UK infants and young children aged 4 to 18 months. Findings from the survey will be published in 2012.

NDNS and DNSIYC were joint funded by the Agency and Department of Health.

Nutrition research

In addition to dietary surveys, the Agency funds two other strands of nutrition research, these aim to provide robust evidence to:

- Inform and develop dietary recommendations in order to improve nutritional well-being (N02: Diet and Cardiovascular Health; N05: Nutritional Status and Function; N12: Diet and Colonic Health).
- Develop and test interventions to bring about dietary improvements in the general population (N09) and in at-risk groups (N14).

The Agency has recently published the results of an independent strategic review of its nutrition research portfolio (<http://www.food.gov.uk/healthiereating/nutres/nutresrev>). The Agency is currently implementing the recommendations of the review to re-focus its nutrition research.

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