

Jan 16, 2006: Low Calorie benefits may be misleading

HAMILTON: A new study proving that reduced calorie diets offer substantial life extension benefits could create the opposite result if improperly interpreted, according to a warning issued by Keep Canada Slim today.

“We have been incorporating the approach recommended in the study for the past 8 years,” said KCS President Lee Fairbanks, “however the use of the term ‘low calorie’ is almost guaranteed to create confusion for the general public. It is unfortunate that the authors of the study chose this term to describe their program. In addition, the study specifies ‘optimal nutrition’ as a requirement for long life. This is another vague term whose benefit is likely to be lost on the general public.”

The report, to be published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology January 17th, proves that people who restrict their caloric intake by a specific amount have heart function equal to people 15 years younger who are eating a “typical” Canadian diet.

“The study proves what we have known for several decades based on animal trials,” explains Fairbanks, “but the wording of the report is guaranteed to be misinterpreted. The report suggests that 1400-2000 calories for women, and 1800-2500 for men represents a ‘low-calorie’ diet. In the real world (as opposed to the world of clinical trials) the term ‘low-calorie’ diet means less than 1200 calories for women and less than 1400 for men. These diets undermine health and increase the risk of disease and shorter lifespan. It is these diets that responsible weight control programs seek to eliminate from the Canadian landscape.”

In addition, says Fairbanks, large groups of at-risk Canadians are not eating the so-called ‘average’ or ‘recommended’ amount of calories to begin with. For these people to reduce calories further is a guaranteed prescription for illness.

“The prevailing opinion that most over-weight Canadians are eating 2000-3000 calories or more per day is a complete myth,” says Fairbanks. “I can tell you – and this is a huge shock to most people – that over 90 per cent of our clients have been on ‘starvation diets’ of less than 1200 calories for months and sometimes even years. For these people to receive the benefits reported in this study they would actually have to eat much more food that they are currently eating.”

Fairbanks suggests that the widespread misunderstanding about calorie counts is the foundation of our country’s weight problems. He says the focus should be on restoring metabolism first, then adjusting calorie intake.

“Contrary to popular opinion, most people with a weight problem today are not over-eating,” explains Fairbanks, “but they do have a depressed metabolism. Following a low-calorie diet plan actually undermines your metabolism, causing you to store fat and burn muscle for energy. The rebound from this approach, known as “yo-yo dieting” leads to ever-increasing body fat and diminishing muscle, the number one health risk for degenerative diseases including heart conditions, diabetes, osteoporosis and many forms of cancer.”

Fairbanks also points out that no “one-size fits all” plan can possibly work for everyone. “News reports and clinical trials often suggest examples of safe ranges, but in truth, everyone is different. Everyone needs their own specific information.”