



All Party Parliamentary Group on Primary Care and Public Health

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Should government consider the role of food supplements in its food policy?

This is the issue addressed in a new report 'Towards a Healthier Britain: The Potential Role of Food Supplements in Government Policy', which is being launched today at the All Party Parliamentary Group on Primary Care & Public Health's Annual Reception.

The report, commissioned by the Proprietary Association of Great Britain,ⁱ is a response to the Cabinet Office publication, 'Food Matters: Towards a Strategy for the 21st Century' which sets out the government's vision for food policy and considers the impact of nutrition on the health of the UK's population. The government recognises that people's diets need to change and that if they 'met nutritional guidelines, 70,000 premature deaths could be prevented each year'.ⁱⁱ But is the nation meeting these dietary recommendations?

In the report, nutrition expert, Dr Pamela Mason, provides an analysis of the nation's nutritional intake and discusses the potential role for food supplements, particularly vitamins and minerals, and identifies the nutritional gap that currently exists.

The five-a-day target for fruit and vegetable intake is not being met and in addition to this, a significant proportion of the fruit and vegetables purchased are not eaten and thrown away. Although mean intakes of many vitamins and minerals in the overall population are at or above recommended levels this does not give the full picture. Intakes of particular vitamins and minerals are at a worrying level below the Reference Nutrient Intake (RNI)ⁱⁱⁱ. This includes particular sub-groups such as women of childbearing age not taking enough folic acid, and about half of pre-school children having average daily intakes of vitamin A below the RNI. Across the UK population, vitamin D status is also a cause of significant concern with increasing reports of deficiency.

The report's author, Dr Pamela Mason, comments: "Whilst encouragement to eat a healthier diet must continue, transition is a long-term process of cultural and behavioural change. Supplements can help to make up gaps in nutrient levels caused by poor diets, which are a

problem for significant numbers of people in this country - young and old. The government already recognises the need for supplementation in certain population groups, but those who could most benefit from supplementation, to maintain health and prevent vitamin deficiency, are likely not to be taking them.”

Co-chair of the APPG, Dr Howard Stoate MP, comments: “The UK diet now is less healthy than following the Second World War when rationing took into account the right balance of nutrients and energy required. Improving the health and wellbeing of people in the UK is a huge challenge for public health and a multi-layered approach is needed to reach everyone and bring changes in behaviour.”

“In order to reduce health inequalities, recommendations from the recent APPG inquiry on public health information include a robust multi-agency approach, involving primary, secondary and social care providers, with funding for a rigorous training programme to ensure providers are aware of their potential to deliver public health programmes. Communicating a sustained message at national and regional level simultaneously is also considered key.”

One way health could be improved is for the government to consider its approach to food policy and recognise the potential benefits of micronutrient supplementation across a broader section of the population, particularly in those groups where dietary intakes are not meeting recommended levels.

-ENDS-

Notes to editors

For further information please contact:

Claire Weaver, Communications Officer on 020 7421 9319 or claire.weaver@pagb.co.uk

Libby Whittaker, Public Affairs Officer on 020 7421 9318 or libby.whittaker@pagb.co.uk

ⁱ Proprietary Association of Great Britain (PAGB) is the UK trade association representing manufacturers of over-the-counter (OTC) medicines and food supplements

ⁱⁱ The Cabinet Office. Food Matters: Towards a Strategy for the 21st Century.

http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/work_areas/food_policy.aspx

ⁱⁱⁱ Reference Nutrient Intake (RNI): The amount of a vitamin or mineral or protein sufficient to meet the dietary needs of about 97% of the UK population.