

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Children 4 to 10 years old who cut the amount of fat in their meals and snacks to lower their cholesterol are as well nourished as those on unmodified diets, a Penn State-led team has shown.

Dr. Jennie McKenzie, lead author on the team's recent report in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association, says, "Our results indicate that you can safely feed a 4- to 10-year-old child a diet in which only 30 percent of the calories come from fat as long as you follow the guidelines on the Food Pyramid."

"Parents can be reassured that, if they follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans as illustrated by the Food Pyramid, they will not be compromising their child's

growth or other nutritional factors to deal with cardiovascular risk through a fat-modified diet," she added.

Most of the children in the study had moderately elevated levels of low-density-lipoprotein (LDL), sometimes called "bad" cholesterol, in their blood. Health professionals often recommend low-fat diets for such children to lower their risk of heart disease when they get older by decreasing their blood lipid levels.

The 303 children, all of whom came from families in the suburbs north of Philadelphia, were divided into four groups. One group received face-to-face counseling once from a registered dietitian and took home print materials for themselves and their parents. An-

other group received a home-based education program that involved parent and child in 10 weekly "talking book" lessons, follow up paper-and-pencil activities, and a manual for parents. The remaining two groups were controls, one group with elevated blood lipids and one without. The controls received no educational program, counseling or printed materials.

Both groups of children who received intervention, either from a dietitian or the home-based education program, reduced their LDL blood levels after three months. However, the group that received home-based education reduced their blood lipid levels faster and showed a greater decline in "bad" cholesterol.

The children in the two intervention groups achieved their lower blood lipid levels by consuming fewer servings of high fat meats, dairy products, fats/oils and desserts and more servings of lower fat foods.

McKenzie says, "It's significant to note that the children did not stop eating meats, dairy products, fats/oils and desserts but rather modified their choices within those food groups by choosing fewer servings or lower fat alternatives."

As a result, despite the lower number of servings from some food groups, the children on modified diets had, on average, adequate intakes of all nutrients, defined as greater than 67 percent of the Recommended Daily Allow-

ance, the same as the kids on the unmodified diets.

McKenzie adds, "It's possible that some well-meaning parent could become overly restrictive toward their child's diet and compromise the child's nutritional status. But, if the adult follows the Food Pyramid guidelines and the child also receives some counseling or education, it's safe to feed a 4- to 10-year-old child a diet in which 30 percent of the calories come from fat."

Copies of the parent and child 10-lesson home-based education program used in the study are available in limited quantities for \$45, from the Penn State Nutrition Center, 5 Henderson Building, University Park, PA 16801.

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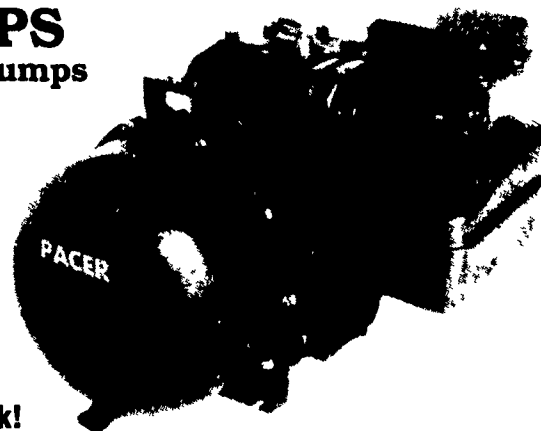
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