True Health Initiative, Leading Experts, Propose a New Metric For Protein Quality

According to a paper published May 8 in Advances in Nutrition, the current definition of protein quality is outdated, incorrect and harmful to public health. Quality protein foods should be those that have a net positive effect on both peoples’ and planetary health. True Health Initiative and top nutrition experts define a new, modernized protein quality metric that can be applied to our food system.

DERBY, Conn. (PRWEB) May 10, 2019 -- In the comprehensive new paper, "The Public Health Case for Modernizing the Definition of Protein Quality” published May 8 in Advances in Nutrition, the True Health Initiative, with leading experts, redefines protein quality based on current scientific evidence and adapts this new definition into a metric that can be applied to national food regulatory and labeling systems. The paper outlines why our current definition of protein quality is obsolete, inaccurate, and harmful to both human and planetary health.

Consumers depend on accurate nutrition information to make food choices that benefit their health and longevity. The current definition of protein quality does not account for the net health effect of protein foods and can promote foods that are in direct opposition to the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans, human health and environmental sustainability. The True Health Initiative paper puts forth a new definition of protein quality that includes:
- The concentration of protein and individual amino acids in the food.
- Assessment of the evidence of health outcomes associated with consumption of the food.
- Assessment of potential environmental impacts of producing the food.

The application of this new metric has the potential to improve public health outcomes, cut health care costs and accelerate the transition to a more sustainable food system by increasing public perception of healthy, affordable and widely available protein sources.

The paper’s authors, David Jenkins, PhD, MD, University of Toronto; Kate Geagan, MS, RD; Kimberly N. Doughty, MPH, PhD, Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center, Christopher D. Gardner, PhD, Stanford University and David L. Katz, MD, MPH, Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center, set forth to meet the urgent needs of public health.

“There really is a perfect storm in modern culture driving misconceptions about protein" says paper co-author and THI Founder David L. Katz, MD, MPH. "There is the idea that the more the better; there is the idea that you need to eat 'complete' protein from animal foods like meat; and there is the idea that foods with the highest protein content are the highest quality food sources of protein. None of these is true.”

What is true is that in the United States and in other developed economies, protein deficiency is not a prevailing health concern; far greater in the 21st century is the epidemic of costly, chronic illness that is directly preventable by changes in diet and lifestyle. Cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer have all been linked to unhealthy diets in general and excessive intake of red and processed meats in particular. In direct contrast, plant-forward diets and diets that include fish, nuts and seeds have been linked to favorable health outcomes, reduced all-cause mortality and reduced cardiovascular mortality.
“The original goal was to promote growth in a vertical direction in the young (height) but if applied to older people, the only direction to grow is laterally (horizontal growth equals = obesity)” says David Jenkins, MD, PhD. "The dietary metrics used now must encourage a lifestyle of health. That is why a new approach to defining protein quality is urgently required that recognizes the value of plant proteins and will allow people to eat for their own health and the health of the environment.”

“The current criteria for determining protein quality are obsolete, particularly for the large proportion of the planet where chronic diseases have displaced infectious diseases as the more prevalent public health concern," says Christopher Gardner, PhD. "The proposed redefinition addresses an urgent need to better align human health with the health of the environment and the sustainable future of food.”

Kimberley N. Doughty, PhD, adds, “I think it’s pretty clear that we have the wrong approach to defining protein quality when processed meats and frozen dinners that are laden with sodium and saturated fat can be labeled ‘good sources of protein.’ That these claims can be made to help sell foods known to be associated with chronic disease risk to consumers who already consume more than enough protein is perverse. The update we have proposed is just common sense.”

“This 'protein fix' is long overdue: consumers deserve an updated definition that better reflects the actual impact of dietary protein sources on public health, aligns with the latest scientific evidence, and helps eaters obsessed with protein make the best choices to match their budget and their health goals," says Kate Geagan, MS, RD. "It’s rare to find a single switch that holds this kind of potential to help solve some of our most urgent public health crises-but 'protein quality' is one of them.”

Studies have shown that nutrient content claims can increase consumers’ perception of a food’s overall healthfulness and are a desirable factor in food purchasing. Updating this metric to reflect the latest science gives consumers necessary, evidence-based information, enabling the public to make choices that improve health.

This new protein definition would update protein content claims to 21st century science and help meet the challenges of feeding 10 billion people on a healthy planet in 2050. The paper is a step in the global movement towards a healthier and more sustainable future.

This project was run by the True Health Initiative, a federally authorized 501c3 not-for-profit, and funded by KIND Healthy Snacks.

ABOUT THE TRUE HEALTH INITIATIVE: We are a global coalition of world-renowned specialists, fighting fake facts and combating false doubts to create a culture free of preventable disease, while conjointly safeguarding planetary health using the time-honored and evidence-based practices of lifestyle as medicine. As the authoritative voice on lifestyle as medicine, we are working to change policy, by enlisting leading experts and commissioning a collection of research to fight fake facts and fix a broken system; change minds, by demonstrating and disseminating the global consensus on the fundamental, evidence-based truths of lifestyle as medicine; and improve lives, by working with communities to create a healthier culture that adds life to years and years to life. Learn more at http://truehealthinitiative.org
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