



The Gawler Foundation

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Opinion piece

Gawler Foundation response to recent findings that low fat diets don't help prevent cancer

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An article in the Australian on February 9, 2006 (pp1 and 3), entitled *Low Fat Diets Don't Help Prevent Cancer*, quoted the WHI Study which was published in the Toronto Star.

Gawler Foundation spokesperson, Professor George Jelinek's response:

Basically, participants made negligible changes and did not lose weight, so you would expect negligible benefits.

The low-fat group reduced their fat intake by an average of only 2.9 per cent and didn't distinguish between so-called "good" and "bad" fats.

"I think you can safely say that very small changes are going to lead to very small changes in cardiovascular disease," said Dr Grant Pierce, chair of the scientific research group of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada.

"We may be knocking the icing off the cake but we've still got a very big cake."

Women in the low-fat group aimed to reduce their fat intake to 20 per cent of their diet and to increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables to at least five servings a day and grains to six servings a day.

While they did increase their fruit and vegetable consumption by one serving a day and grains by about a half serving, "that's not a whole lot, is it?" Pierce asked. "I think you have to take that into consideration."

"The study showed a trend toward higher rates of cardiovascular disease in subjects who ate higher amounts of trans fats, and a trend toward lower rates of disease in those with a higher vegetable intake", he said.

"The trends are there as we would expect, but maybe it's just a matter that you can't tinker with the diet, you need to make some real changes," Pierce said.

In interviews with more than 50 specialists conducted by ABC News, questions were raised about the study's shortcomings. The experts said:



- The study was too short to detect a reduction in breast and colon cancer from dietary fat.
- The amount of fat reduction was too small and was unlikely to produce meaningful benefits.

The researchers simply looked at fat intake in general and did not distinguish between healthy fats like olive oil and unhealthy fats like trans fats.'

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