

SECTION OF NUTRITION AND METABOLISM (NME)

Head

Dr Silvia Franceschi

POOR NUTRITION IS AN IMPORTANT CANCER RISK FACTOR IN THE DEVELOPED WORLD, ALTHOUGH THE ROLE OF SPECIFIC NUTRITIONAL FACTORS AND THEIR MECHANISMS OF ACTION REMAIN ILL-UNDERSTOOD. OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY REPRESENT A GLOBAL EPIDEMIC CONTRIBUTING TO A NUMBER OF COMMON CHRONIC DISEASES, INCLUDING CANCER. AT THE SAME TIME, LACK OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND ENERGY BALANCE ARE INCREASINGLY RECOGNISED AS BEING IMPORTANT DETERMINANTS OF CANCER RISK. IN LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES THE ROLE OF DIET IS FAR LESS STUDIED, AND FUTURE RESEARCH SHOULD INCLUDE UNDER-NUTRITION AS WELL AS OVER-NUTRITION.

In the recent re-organisation of the IARC scientific structure, a new Section of Nutrition and Metabolism was created. Its main objectives are to investigate the causes and prevention of cancer in association with diet (including biomarkers of diet), obesity, physical inactivity and endogenous hormones, through different existing (e.g. the EPIC study) and new epidemiological and clinical studies in developed and middle- and low-income countries. The NME section is also charged with investigating the role of nutrition and metabolism in cancer etiology using internal laboratory facilities and complementary expertise from internal and external support and collaborations.

Selection of a new section head is underway, and therefore new research activities for the next biennium are under discussion. As such, only activities related to the Dietary Exposure Assessment (DEX) Group (formerly the Nutrition and Hormone [NTR] Team) are reported here.

DIETARY EXPOSURE ASSESSMENT GROUP (DEX)

Head

Dr Nadia Slimani (since 04/09)

Scientists

Dr Sabina Rinaldi

Dr Véronique Chajès (Visiting scientist, from March 2008)

Post-doctoral fellows

Dr Heinz Freisling
(from March 2009)

Dr Inge Huybrechts
(from April 2008)

Dr Aurelie Moskal
(from February 2009)

Dr Kimberley Bouckaert
(February 2008 to February 2009)

Secretariat

Myriam Adjal
(until February 2009)

Nicole Suty (until October 2008)

Technical Assistants

David Achaintre

Carine Biessy

Corinne Casagrande

Geneviève Deharveng

Bertrand Hemon

Carole Manigand

(until September 2008)

Jérôme Vignat

DIET IS CONSIDERED AN IMPORTANT ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR IN THE ETIOLOGY OF SEVERAL MAJOR CANCERS. HOWEVER, THERE ARE STILL INCONSISTENT RESULTS ON THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DIET AND CANCER, LEADING TO A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE TRADITIONAL STUDY DESIGNS AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES USED SO FAR. THE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE DEX GROUP ARE TO IMPROVE THE ACCURACY, UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETATION OF DIETARY EXPOSURE AND TO STRENGTHEN THE LIKELIHOOD OF DETECTING ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN DIET AND CANCER AND OTHER INTERMEDIATE DISEASES IN INTERNATIONAL STUDY CONTEXTS. OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS, DEX HAD FIVE MAJOR AXES OF ACTIVITIES, DETAILED BELOW:

1. ADVANCED RESEARCH ON DIETARY METHODOLOGIES AND LABORATORY ACTIVITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

A focal point of the DEX Group is to develop methods for the standardisation of dietary data collection, data processing and statistical analyses in large international multi-centre studies. This involves the development of a standardised computerised 24-hour dietary recall programme (EPIC-Soft) and the enrichment and maintenance of a large international standardised nutrient database (ENDB) and its related database management system program (EnMan). Over the last two years, the EPIC-Soft programme initially developed for EPIC in the early 1990s has been substantially restructured and extended so that it may be used as a standardised method and reference in future international studies. Furthermore, a comprehensive platform to be hosted on the IARC website is under development to facilitate the use and dissemination of the whole EPIC-Soft methodology. Discussions at the international level (the European Food

Safety Authority, the Directorate General for Health and Consumer Affairs [DG-SANCO], WHO, the European Food Information Resource [EuroFIR] Network) are ongoing to establish a network of future possible users of the platform and plan new inter-disciplinary projects on cancer research and prevention.

More recently, a new international methodological project has been initiated to compare different multivariate approaches (e.g. principal component analysis, cluster analysis) relevant to analyses of diet-disease associations in international study context. In this project the DEX group, in collaboration with the IARC Biostatistics Group (BST), is specifically in charge of the nutrient and biological pattern analyses, with already-planned applications to cancer and diabetes.

Another important activity of DEX is its laboratory-based support to hormone analyses in large epidemiological studies. Over the last two years, the laboratory activities have focused on the validation studies of cytokine and steroid measurements. Measurement of inflammatory factors and sex hormones by using immunoassays has also been undertaken in large-scale epidemiological studies within the EPIC cohort (endometrium and cervical cancers). In addition to these more routine analyses, a reference method for the measurements of Bisphenol A (BPA, a xenoestrogen and food contaminant) in serum using gas chromatography/mass spectrometry has been established.

2. CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDIES ON DIET AND BIOMARKERS OF DIET

Following the completion of a standardised nutrient database for use in the international context of the EPIC study (*Slimani et al., 2007), a special issue of the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition entitled *Nutrient Intakes and Patterns in EPIC* has been prepared under DEX supervision (*Slimani & Margetts eds, in press). In addition, a series of cross-sectional analyses using standardised dietary and biomarker exposure measurements (e.g. blood fatty acid

concentrations, acrylamide hemoglobin adducts) have been published or are ongoing. These analyses enable, for example, a better understanding of two new plasma phospholipid fatty acid isomers (*cis* C18:n-9 Oleic acid and *trans* C18:n-9 Elaidic acid) with suspected opposite effects on risk cancer, as biomarkers of olive oil and margarine respectively (Figure 1) (*Saadatian-Elahi et al., 2009).

3. DIET AND CANCER AND OTHER (INTERMEDIATE) CHRONIC DISEASES

A specific topic of interest for the DEX group is the study of the role of diet and biomarkers of diet in relation to cancer (EPIC) and other chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes (PANACEA, INTERACT projects), with a particular recent focus on industrial foods (industrial trans fatty acids, acrylamide, energy and glycaemic index/glycaemic load dense foods, BPA). Within the EPIC-PANACEA project on obesity and lifestyle factors, DEX has produced papers on the relationship between diets rich in foods with high glycaemic index/glycaemic load and trans fatty acid concentrations and obesity [REFs], as well as a methodological paper on under-reporting amongst obese subjects, using both dietary and biomarker data [REF].

4. HORMONES AND CANCER

Over the last biennium, research has focused on colorectal, cervical, endometrial and thyroid cancers. Results from nested case-control studies within EPIC on colorectal cancer have shown a mild implication of hyperglycemia (Figure 2), and a modest association with serum insulin-like growth factors (*Rinaldi *et al.*, 2008; *Rinaldi *et al.*, in press). DEX has also coordinated the working group on thyroid cancer within the EPIC cohort, and studies on obesity, thyroid hormones, reproductive factors and thyroid cancer risk are ongoing.

5. SUPPORT THE COORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE EPIC STUDY

Over the last two years, the DEX Group has ensured technical support and preparation of a series of common and project-specific databases for a large network of 33 different EPIC working groups and related projects, including a new release of the EPIC dietary and endpoint data. In addition, the group has provided computing support and has managed a complex Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) to access biological sample retrieval and to collect related laboratory results.

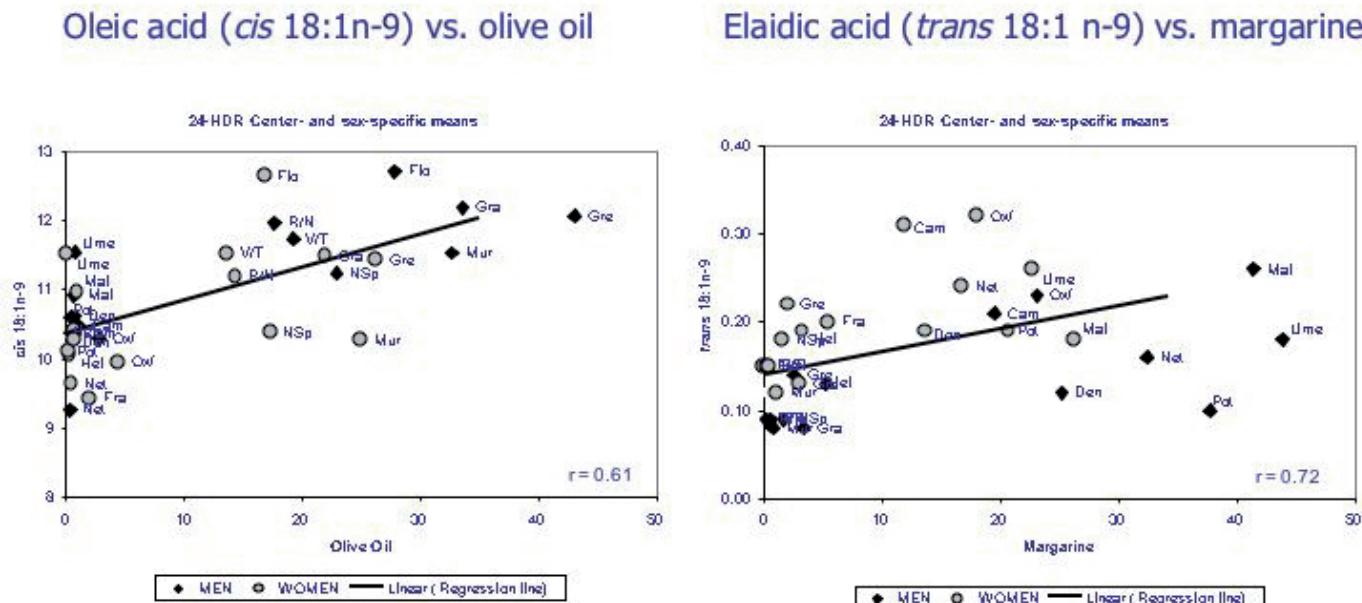


Figure 1. Two mono-unsaturated plasma fatty acid isomers as markers of dietary sources with opposite suggested cancer effects
Saadatian-Elahi *et al.*, Am. J. Clin., 2009

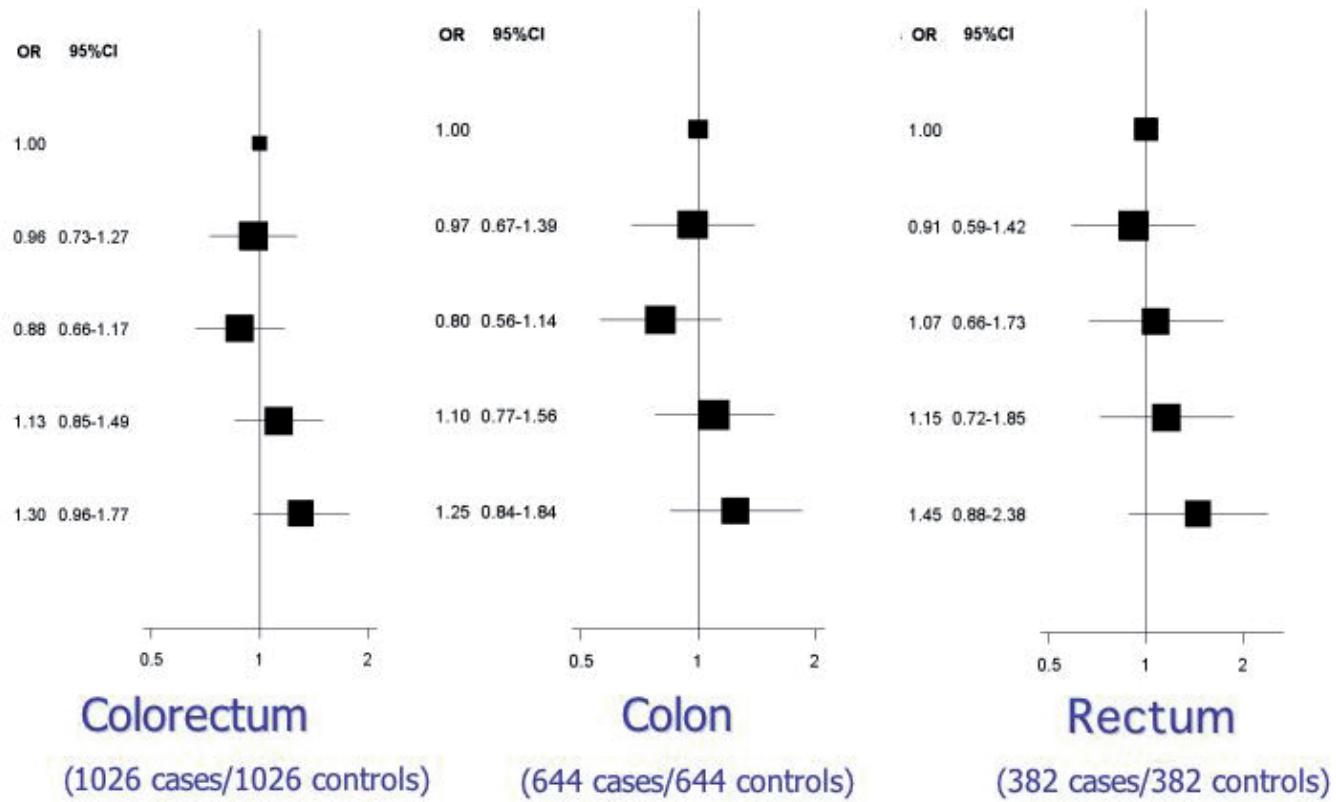


Figure 2. Glycated hemoglobin and risk of colorectal cancer: EPIC. Rinaldi et al., Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev. 2008

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