

Summary of the Conference presentation

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Dangers of Diets Recommended by Esoteric and other New Age Groups

The term 'esoteric' (or 'new age') nutrition is herein associated with any form of rigorous and restrictive diet that excludes specific food or food groups. The greatest danger of these types of nutrition is for infants, children and adolescents because they are in the stage of growth and development and the lack of any nutrient in this age leads to irreversible consequences in adulthood.

Scientifically-reliable studies have shown that almost all restrictive diets that exclude some types of food or food groups lead to a reduced intake of certain nutrients with negative consequences.

There is a deficit of calcium (osteoporosis), zinc, iron (anemia), vitamin D (rickets, osteoporosis), vitamin A (blindness), vitamin B2 (riboflavin) and vitamin B12 (neuromuscular deficit).

A lack of vitamin D is observed in infants on restrictive diets, which leads to rickets in numerous cases. For infants on macrobiotic diet, the lack of vitamin D leads to a stagnation in growth and development compared to children fed on diets with no exclusion of certain foods.

Nursing mothers on a restrictive diet lack calcium and vitamin D, which leads to decreased bone mineral density, and thus accelerates the occurrence of osteoporosis, while a deficiency of vitamin B12, which is exclusively found in foods of animal origin leads to elevated levels of homocysteine in the blood ; these high levels are turn connected with a higher prevalence of cardiovascular disease and to various neurological and psychological problems.

Mineral substances other than calcium are absent in restrictive diets, notably zinc and iron which may be due to a reduction in their bioavailability in foods of plant origin.

A diet which excludes certain foods for non-medical reasons and are designed without the advice of experts can be harmful to human health; it is important that parents should be aware of the hazards that such diets may carry and should ensure that they provide adequate quantities of all nutrients for themselves and their children.

Ultimately, in cases where the parents do not want to give up their principles and insist on esoteric or new-age diets, legislation should come into play in order to protect the children and ensure that such rigorous diets that threaten human health and life are prohibited and illegal.