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February 2015 Media Alert:
The Journal of Nutrition

The following articles are being published in the February 2015 issue of *The Journal of Nutrition*, a publication of the American Society for Nutrition. Summaries of the selected articles appear below; the full text of each article is available by clicking on the links listed. Manuscripts published in
The Journal of Nutrition are embargoed until the article appears online either as in press (Articles in Press) or as a final version. The embargoes for the following articles have expired.

Survey of low-income households supports efficacy of federally-funded food assistance program

Researchers continue to question purported link between saturated fats and heart disease

Mouse study: whole-grain oats may improve health by altering resident bacterial communities

Survey of low-income households supports efficacy of federally-funded food assistance program
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the most important food assistance in the U.S. In fact, its roots go back to the 1930s when the government launched its first "food stamp program." This original program remained in existence for only a brief 4 years, but an updated version was relaunched in 1961 by President Kennedy. By 1964, the program had expanded into 22 States and served nearly 380,000 participants. Today, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides benefits to nearly 48 million low-income Americans each month. But does participation in SNAP actually impact food consumption patterns and improve nutrition? To shed some light on this question, Drs. James Mabli and Jim Ohls from Mathematica Policy Research in Princeton, N.J., analyzed food-related national survey data collected from nearly 6500 American SNAP households. Their findings, suggesting that SNAP participation improves food security, is published in the February 2015 issue of *The Journal of Nutrition*.

In their research, Mabli and Ohls surveyed two sets of SNAP-eligible households. The first consisted of about 3200 that had just registered in the program. Individuals from these households were interviewed both at time of enrollment and then again 6 months later. The other set of nearly 3300 households had already been participating in SNAP for 6 months. Food insecurity - characterized by having reduced quality, variety, or desirability of available food - was assessed by asking a series of 10 questions. For instance, participants were queried as to whether they were worried as to if their food would run out before they got money to buy more. Households answering yes to at least 3 of these questions were designated as being food insecure. Those answering yes to at least 6 questions were classified as severely food insecure. The researchers then compared food security measures between groups and over time.

Regardless of how they analyzed their data, the researchers found that SNAP

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participation decreased both food insecurity and severe food insecurity by as much as 19%. They concluded "SNAP serves a vital role in improving the health and well-being of households by increasing food security." These scientists encourage additional research designed to obtain more information as to how participation in SNAP impacts allocation of household finances and overall well-being.

Reference Mabli J, Ohls J. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program participation is associated with an increase in household food security in a national evaluation. *Journal of Nutrition* 145: 344-51, 2015.
For More Information To contact the corresponding author, Dr. James Mabli, please send an e-mail to jmabli@mathematica-mpr.com.

Researchers continue to question purported link between saturated fats and heart disease

Everyone knows that eating saturated fats is bad for your heart, right? Indeed, dietary guidelines aimed at preventing heart disease invariably include recommendations to reduce saturated fat intake. However, although older studies had advocated that this approach provided heart-healthy outcomes, a growing number of well-designed research studies now suggest this common dietary advice may be unfounded. For instance, consuming a diet low in saturated fats but high in certain carbohydrates most certainly is not advantageous and might be deleterious to heart health. Other studies strongly support the premise that, despite the fact that they tend to be high in saturated fats, diets rich in dairy products are associated with lower risk for cardiovascular disease. Consequently, many well-versed nutrition experts are beginning to doubt the long-held notion that lowering saturated fat intake necessarily leads to better health. Nonetheless, researchers continue to study whether there might be segments of the population that would benefit from lower saturated fat intake. One such population consists of individuals with established heart coronary artery disease and being cared for via modern medical treatments. To shed light on this question, Nathalie Puaschitz, a member of a Norwegian research team led by Professor Ottar Nygård (University of Bergen), studied the relationship between saturated fat intake and risk of subsequent coronary events in ~2400 heart patients. Details about this study can be found in the February 2015 issue of *The Journal of Nutrition*.

Information on saturated fat intake was obtained using a comprehensive, 10-page questionnaire. Blood samples were taken and analyzed for a variety of factors thought to be related to cardiovascular risk, and participants were followed for ~5 years during which time coronary events were recorded.

As expected, patients with higher saturated fat intake also had higher intakes of meat, cheese, butter, milk, eggs, cakes, sugar, and sweets. However, and contrary to what would be assumed from current dogma and dietary recommendations, there were no significant associations between saturated fat intake and risk of coronary events during the follow-up period. The researchers concluded that their findings indicate that a high saturated fat intake may not be a substantial risk factor among patients with established heart disease receiving modern medical treatment.

Reference Puaschitz NG, Strand E, Norekvål, Dierkes J, Dahl L, Svingen GFT, Assmus J, Schartum-Hansen H, Øyen J, Pedersen EKR, Drevon CA, Tell GS, Nygård O. Dietary intake of saturated fat is not associated with risk of coronary events or mortality in patients with established coronary artery disease. *Journal of Nutrition* 145: 299-305, 2015.
For More Information To contact the corresponding author, Dr. Nathalie Genevieve Puaschitz, please send an e-mail to nathalie.genevieve.puaschitz@helse-bergen.no.

Mouse study: whole-grain oats may improve health by altering resident bacterial communities

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that we "make half our

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grains whole grains." An example is eating whole-wheat bread instead of white bread and brown rice instead of polished rice. This guideline and many others like it have been established from broad-based evidence that people who eat more whole-grain foods tend to be healthier than those who eat less. For example, whole-grain consumption seems to protect against development of type 2 diabetes and colorectal cancer. What exactly is driving these associations is not well understood, although nutrition scientists speculate that it might be due to specific proteins, fiber, certain vitamins or minerals, or a combination of these nutrients. Moreover, some experts have proposed that consumption of whole-grain foods alters the type of bacteria that live in our gastrointestinal tracts. In a study published in the February 2015 issue of *The Journal of Nutrition*, researchers from Utah State University report their findings that whole-grain oats may exert their health benefits via better regulation of blood glucose, improvements in blood lipids, and modulation of our resident bacterial communities.

The research, which was led by Dr. Michael Lefevre, documented what happens when laboratory mice are fed diets containing either whole-grain oat flour or low-bran oat flour for 8 weeks. Results showed that animals consuming the whole-grain flour gained less weight, had improved insulin sensitivity, and lower levels of "bad" cholesterol. Compared to those consuming the low-bran flour, animals fed the whole-grain flour also had relatively higher abundances of several bacterial families (e.g., Lactobacillaceae) in their intestines.

Lefevre and his team concluded that increasing one's whole-grain oat consumption may help improve insulin sensitivity and dyslipidemia in humans as well, and that these effects may be mediated by alterations in gastrointestinal microbial communities. Of course, intervention studies in human populations will be needed to test this hypothesis. Dr. Lefevre is also studying whether the effects seen with whole-grain oats on bacterial communities is also seen for other types of grains.

Reference Zhou AL, Hergert N, Rompato G, Lefevre M. Whole grain oats improve insulin sensitivity and plasma cholesterol profile and modify gut microbiota composition in C57BL/6J mice. *Journal of Nutrition* 145: 222-30, 2015.

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