

Letters to the Editor

A Score Derived From the Canadian Food Guide for Assessing Diet Quality: A Risky Illusion?



To the Editor:

We acknowledge and agree that inadequate diet quality is one of the leading causes of premature death worldwide,¹ and it is therefore essential to assess population diet quality using the best recognized scales. The Dietary Patterns Methods Project was launched in the United States in 2012 to identify the best dietary quality indices.² Three stood out as superior: aHEI-2010 (alternate Healthy Eating Index 2010), aMED (alternate Mediterranean Diet), and DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension).

Brassard et al. work with the assumption that the Canadian-Health Eating Index 2005 (C-HEI-2005) is a valid tool for assessing diet quality.³ The C-HEI-2005 aims to reflect dietary recommendations of the Canadian Food Guide 2007 (CFG),⁴ which does not incorporate the current best available evidence on diet and health and thus does not provide an appropriate bar against which to develop a diet-quality index. The wisdom of providing the maximum score (10 points) for 2 to 4 servings of milk products, and 1 to 3 servings of meat and alternatives is debatable. Moreover, evidence on health outcomes does not support including potatoes as vegetables; juice as fruit; and legumes, nuts, and fish in the same category as red meat. Further, no negative points are given for red meat and/or processed meat and for juice and sugary drinks, and there is no basis for giving a maximum score for a low-fat diet.

Assessing dietary quality and population trends in dietary quality is essential, as it provides evidence to guide public health policies. Although we applaud efforts to do this, a comprehensive diet-quality analysis requires valid dietary quality indices. The use of the C-HEI-2005, based on the 2007 CFG, could be misleading.

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Disclosures

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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