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# epic

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## *The EPIC study of nutrition and health: will you help us again?*

During the past year you very kindly helped us by filling in a questionnaire for EPIC, and perhaps by also sending us a blood sample. The information which you have already provided is of great value to us. We are writing now to ask whether you would be prepared to help us again by filling in a diary of what you eat and drink during one week.

A food diary for you is enclosed. If you would like to help us again, please follow the instructions in the diary and write down exactly what you eat. We understand that this is asking for quite a lot of your time, but the food diary is a very important part of the information collected for EPIC. The questionnaire which you have already completed included many questions on your food intake over the previous twelve months, but it could not cover all aspects of diet such as exact types of foods, use of organic produce, cooking methods and meal patterns. Filling in the food diary will complete the picture of your usual diet, giving us much more accurate information on food and nutrient intake than any previous study of this type. Please read the instructions carefully and give us as much detail as possible.

## *Progress report on EPIC in Europe*

So far, over 400,000 people in nine countries have helped EPIC by completing a questionnaire on diet and health and in most cases by also providing a blood sample. Recruitment into the study is almost complete, and it is expected that 440,000 people will participate, making EPIC by far the largest study of nutrition and health ever undertaken.

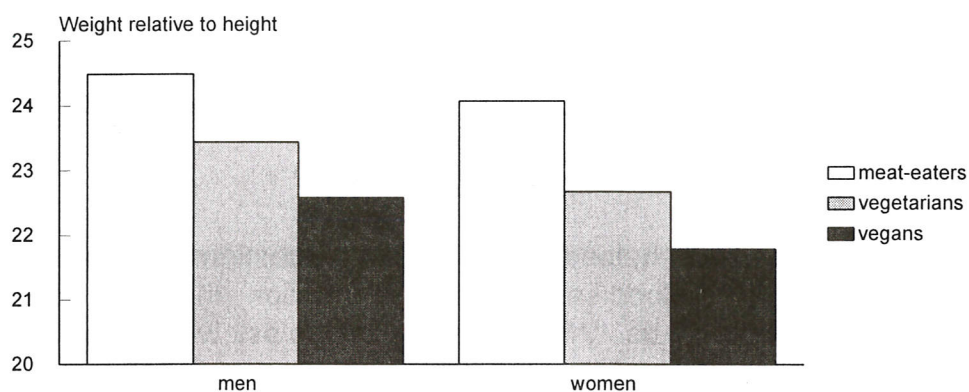
## *EPIC in Britain*

In Britain, recruitment into EPIC has progressed well both in Oxford and in the Cambridge centre (operating in East Anglia). In Oxford we have made a particular effort to recruit vegetarians and vegans. To date we have recruited 55,000 men and women, of whom about 50% are vegetarians. Over the past four years we have recruited vegetarians and vegans in several ways, including:

Leaflet questionnaire in BBC Vegetarian Good Food magazine - 4,000 replies  
Mailout to previous participants in the Oxford Vegetarian Study - 3,500 replies  
Mailout to members of The Vegetarian Society - 1996 4,500 replies; 1998 4,000  
Leaflet questionnaire in The Vegan magazine - 800 replies  
"Snowballing" - 25,000 replies

### *What is EPIC doing at the moment?*

At present most of our resources are being used to collect information and enter it onto a computer, but we are also starting to process the data. As an example, the graph below shows average weight relative to height (known as the Body Mass Index - an estimate of fatness) for men and women meat-eaters, vegetarians and vegans.



The graph shows that, on average, both male and female vegans are thinner than vegetarians, and vegetarians are thinner than meat-eaters.

Other work underway is using the blood samples to find out whether the level of oestrogen in women, which is known to be related to breast cancer risk, is affected by nutritional factors such as meat, fat, fibre, soya and alcohol.

### *When will the major results appear?*

The main results from EPIC, on subjects such as the risk of cancer in relation to diet, will start to be published in 2001.

Recent reports from the Department of Health and from our research group have confirmed that diets rich in fruit and vegetables reduce the risk for several types of cancer and that vegetarians have lower mortality from coronary heart disease than meat-eaters. However, many gaps in our knowledge remain and EPIC, as the largest detailed study of diet and health ever undertaken, should produce uniquely important new results. The Oxford arm of EPIC is by far the largest study of vegetarians in the world and will be able to provide definitive information on the long term health of vegetarians and vegans in Britain - information of great value for vegetarians, for those contemplating a vegetarian diet, and for the medical profession.

*Please continue to help us*

We hope very much that you will continue to help by completing the food diary. Please send back the diary in the enclosed prepaid envelope. If you need to contact us again you can write to EPIC, FREEPOST OF1716, University of Oxford, Gibson Building, Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford OX2 6BR, or telephone EPIC on 01865 516329.

Thank you very much for your help.

Dr Timothy Key

Dr Gwyneth Davey