

**What is next: challenges for the implementation of nutritional policies
(EU and national): The role of nutritionists**

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ABSTRACT

Nutritional policies aim at healthy dietary practices of the population to ensure present health and, indirectly but very importantly, at the prevention of nutrition dependent diseases during the course of life. Nutritionists are the persons who have to develop and deliver both the scientific basis for energy and nutrient requirements and convert them into intake recommendations. The conversion of nutritional science and knowledge into dietary practices which can be understood and followed by consumers is the real challenge for nutritional scientists. Good dietary practices cannot be established by decree – although there are examples that governments have tried to do so – and their implementation is certainly dependent on the availability of sufficient, safe and varied food supplies. Good dietary practices alone, however, are not sufficient. Lifestyle factors and physical exercise' also have to be considered. Consumers do not eat 'nutrients' but foods. After having established goals for nutrient intakes or desirable ranges for dietary factors, these goals have to be translated into food choice patterns to enable consumers to compose their own diets without having to calculate calories and nutrient amounts. Food based dietary guidelines were proposed by a Joint FAO/WHO Consultation in 1998 and by many nutritional societies. These food based dietary guidelines must be scientifically sound and at the same time short, simple, clear, easily remembered, culturally appropriate and communicated well. They must be practical and it should be tested if the messages they contain are comprehensible for the average consumer. Compliance with dietary guidelines should be monitored. It is notoriously bad. This cannot only be attributed to disinterestedness but can be due to misconceptions on the part of the consumer. Nutritional education starting as early as possible, both by practical demonstration and provision of theoretical knowledge, is the only way to avoid misconceptions about healthy nutrition and its importance for health throughout the life. Bad dietary habits die hard.