

Editorial

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The American Medical Association published its Concepts of Nutrition and Health, J.A.M.A., Nov. 23/79, volume 242, pages 2335-2338. This statement represents an improvement over earlier ideas but still ignores most of the research relating poor nutrition to disease; it would have been a very useful statement in 1950. Basically it supports the view that selection of foods from four food groups will be satisfactory and that it has the advantage that this scheme "has proved to be effective in teaching illiterate persons." The AMA recommends: (1) milk and its products, two or more servings; (2) meat, fish and high protein vegetables, two servings; (3) vegetables and fruit, four servings and (4) bread and cereals, four or more servings. If one adheres to the minimum quantity this guide will provide about 1300 calories. For most of us who require more the AMA recommends more or larger servings "and by use of foods such as fats, oils and sugars." The guide does recommend moderation in the use of the latter junk foods but is fearful of implying these be avoided; since they follow the Harvard guide this is not surprising.

The following food in one day will satisfy the AMA Council on Scientific Affairs: two hamburgers on buns from any fast food outlet, one large milkshake, two orders of french fries, two pieces of apple pie and two

pieces of white toast. I have seen many patients whose basic diet would conform to AMA standards who do not recover until placed upon a nutritious diet.

The AMA has no interest in the way foods are prepared, in the effect of processing on the quality of food, or in additives. In fact, the AMA is distressed because the "public is continually distracted by announcements of hazards associated with foods, food additives or various dietary practices. Many warnings are unfounded or premature, but the fears thus engendered adversely influence attitudes about foods. The public is also misled by extravagant claims of health benefits derived from the use of certain foods or nutrient supplements." In other words, the AMA wants to protect you against the evils of good food, properly prepared, combined with nutrient supplements when needed.

The AMA introduces its report thus: "More food notions flourish in the United States than in any other civilized country on earth, and most of them are wrong." I wonder why the AMA has not examined its own role as the main factor in this if, in fact, the USA does have more erroneous food notions. Perhaps one could with equal validity say that the AMA promotes more wrong food notions than any other medical association in the world.