

Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition

Paper for Information:

**Update on Iron Working
Group**

Agenda item 8

Please see attached paper for information and discussion. Minutes of the meeting held on 8 March are attached.

Members are invited to comment

Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition

Working Group on Iron Update

1. At SACN's first meeting (13 June 2001), it was agreed that as iron was an outstanding issue from the COMA work programme, it should be one of SACN's initial undertakings. A Working Group was therefore established. The Group has met once to date (7 March 2002).

Background

2. National surveys like NDNS, have consistently found that a large proportion of some groups in the UK and particularly young women and adolescent girls, children and the elderly, have low iron status and therefore may be at risk of iron deficiency anaemia. Meat, and in particular red meat, is a key source of iron. However, in 1998, the COMA report on *Nutritional Aspects of the Development of Cancer* highlighted possible links between red meat and bowel cancer, and recommended that 'higher consumers should consider a reduction' in intakes. There are concerns that reducing meat consumption might compromise micronutrient status, especially in some population groups.

Terms of Reference of the Working Group:

4. The terms of reference for the Working Group are:

"To review the dietary intakes of iron in its various forms and the impact of various dietary patterns on the nutritional and health status of the population and to make proposals".

5. Both the beneficial and adverse effects of increasing iron intakes would be considered, including the:
 - effect of low-grade infections/inflammation on iron status.
 - effects of iron status on mental and physical development.

- effect of nutritional status of other micronutrients on iron absorption and utilisation.
- potential adverse effects of excess iron, in particular, promotion of free radical damage and the risk of cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Membership

6. **Chair:** Professor Peter Aggett; **Vice Chair:** Dr Ann Prentice.

Members: Dr Bruno de Benoist; Professor Philip Calder; Professor Sue Fairweather-Tait; Professor Sally Grantham-McGregor; Ms Paulette Jones; Professor Joe Lunec; Dr Tim Key; Professor Kim Michaelsen; Professor Martin Pippard; Professor Mark Worwood.

Progress to date

7. At the first meeting (8 March 2002), the Working Group:
- noted general administration matters such as SACN's *Code of Practice* and *Openness of Committee Proceedings*;
 - discussed relevant research material and identified gaps in the evidence and the literature required to address these;
 - agreed the broad structure of the report:

Provisional outline chapters for the Report

- Executive Summary
- Introduction & Overview
- Iron Absorption
- Dietary Sources & Bioavailability
- Dietary Reference Values
- Iron Deficiency Anaemia
- Iron & Immune Function
- Iron, Psychomotor & Cognitive Development
- Iron & Central Nervous System

- Iron & Work Performance
8. The second meeting will be held on 24 July 2002, with a view to producing a first draft report by November 2002 and aiming to publish the final report by the end of 2003.