

Book reviews

Table of composition of Australian Aboriginal bush foods by J. Brand Miller, K. James and P. Maggiore

Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press
ISBN: 08557524 24 (pb), 256pp.

This book is the first comprehensive set of tables of composition of 500 foods indigenous to Australia.

Virtually all food eaten by non-Aboriginal Australians has been exotic to this continent, except the fish and shellfish. This was probably related to the lack of reliable and standardized information available to non-Aboriginals on the nutrient composition of native Australian bush foods, their safety and preparation.

Aborigines have lived in Australia for more than 40 000 years; all their foods once came from the gathering of plant foods and hunting of wild animals or fishing, and they appear to have thrived on this exclusively bush food diet. The knowledge of Aboriginal Australians (especially the elders) regarding edible bush foods, is therefore an invaluable resource. By demystifying the nutrient composition of bush foods, this not only provides opportunity to expose these nutritious, nutrient-dense foods to the world, increasing the food variety of our current diets, but also encourages Aboriginal people especially, to retain, even in part, their traditional food habits which appeared to have kept them in relatively good health.

The strength of this book is that most foods listed in the tables were collected and processed by Australian Aborigines. The foods are clearly and unambiguously named and described and the source given for each food listing. Procedures were used to assure the quality of the

data, such as multiple sampling. However, the authors cautioned that not all the foods listed are safe to eat and that the nutrient figures do not reflect the average composition of the food, given the nature of 'wild' plants which have not been cultivated under controlled conditions. This means that the calculation of nutrient or other food component intakes may require caution.

Nevertheless, the data provide an invaluable insight into the bush food source of various nutrients (even if figures are 'ball-park'). A limitation of the tables is that some of the water-soluble vitamins are not listed (such as folacin, pyridoxine and cobalamin). However, the minerals are well represented (including zinc, copper, lead, cadmium).

It is obvious that a great deal of work has gone into compiling these foods, yet gaps exist. The benefits, however, of having such a resource available to us outweighs the limitations. The book will be useful to the Aboriginal community and to those interested in the nutritional status and health of Aboriginal Australians. The tables will also be of interest to biologists, historians, and chefs. We can look forward to the cultivation of some of these native bush foods in Australia. To quote Truswell, 'it is time that Australia offered something back to the rest of the world as food for the table'.

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Easy Cooking in Retirement by Louise Davies

London: Penguin Books Ltd
ISBN 0-14-046894-3 (pb), 345pp. £5.99.

In the first chapter of *Easy Cooking in Retirement*, Louise Davies offers sound advice on sensible eating. The remaining chapters provide interesting recipes for different occasions such as preparing breakfasts to cooking for children.

This book has a good selection of recipes from old time favourites such as steak and kidney pudding, bubble and squeak and caramel custard, to more adventurous and exotic dishes such as tiramisu, hot fruit salad and carrot

raita. There is enough variety to cater for individual tastes.

Serving sizes for most recipes are small to suit retired households. There are some useful tips on freezing portions of recipes and storing ingredients that require preparation. Recipes include both metric and imperial weights making it easier for those who feel comfortable with one type of measure, and the layout and instructions are easy to follow.

Snippets of information about how recipes have been acquired or how best to enjoy them tempts the reader to try the recipes.

The fat content of some recipes could be modified further without significantly altering the flavour or

texture of the dishes. One recipe in particular (courgette medley) claims to use very little fat but in fact uses quite the contrary.

There are some rather unusual ingredients (at least not readily known in Australia), and tracking down these items may not be so easy for those in retirement. A glossary providing information on where these ingredients can be found, or substitutes that could be readily used would make this book more appealing to a broader cross section of older people.

Overall, most retired people would enjoy eating their

way through this book. It can therefore be recommended to patients and public by those working in clinical nutrition.

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Food and Nutrition in Fiji: A Historical Review

Edited by A.A.J. Jansen, S. Parkinson and A.F.S. Robertson

Volume 1: Food Production, Composition and Intake. ISBN 982-02-0060-1 (pb), 479pp. US\$18.

Volume 2: Nutrition-Related Diseases and their Prevention. ISBN 9-8202 0061-X (pb) 719pp. US\$18.

Jointly published by The Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, Fiji School of Medicine and The Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1990.

There has been a recent surge of interest among the public, academic and governmental agencies to understand the relationship between food habit, nutrition and the epidemiology of many chronic diseases in both developed and developing nations. Availability and appropriate application of relevant food nutrition research data could effectively reduce and control nutrition-related diseases. On the other hand, prevention of these conditions, would be difficult where research data are not available for use in developing intervention strategies. In the less developed nations, these data are not easily available. The book *Food and Nutrition in Fiji: A Historical Review* is therefore a remarkable achievement. This book with 14 'eminent guest writers', edited by two renowned scholars and nutritionists, has 38 comprehensive articles presented in two volumes and expresses two main aims. The first aim is to 'make information available and rescue older information from oblivion'. The second aim is to acknowledge 'earlier researchers in the field of food and nutrition who often worked under difficult and frustrating conditions'. These objectives have been brilliantly achieved by the editors, a really tedious task in developing nations.

Volume 1 covers a historical review of food production, composition and food intake. To enable the reader to select papers covering the areas of interest, a collection of surveys, research and governmental statistical data on related topics are assembled under the following 10 topics: the evolution of the Fiji food system; food composition; food preparation and food preservation; food intake; the feeding of infants and young children; aquaculture; fish consumption, and food technology. The topics cover enormous studies ranging from Fiji's geogaphy, political system, population, health status, economy, historical and present agricultural

practices, and historical and present food technology.

Volume 2 contains 28 articles, and deals with nutrition-related diseases and their prevention. The specific subject areas presented include an overview of literature on aspects of morbidity and mortality in Fiji with demographic data from 1881-1986; clinical aspects of protein energy malnutrition, anthropometric data, parasitic diseases and food contamination, nutrition intervention; diabetes mellitus; cardiovascular diseases; cancer and hereditary disorders to mention a few. It is interesting to note the comparisons of the prevalence and the incidence of diseases between gender, between males and females, between rural and urban areas and between the two major ethnic groups in Fiji, namely the Indians and the native Fijians. For example, the rate of the communicable diseases are higher in the urban than the rural areas. Rural and urban Indians have significantly higher diabetes prevalence rates than native Fijians. With reference to cardiovascular diseases, the overall mean systolic and diastolic blood pressure of Fijians and Indians increases with age, but blood pressure rose more with age in Indians than Fijians. Acute myocardial infarction is predominantly a disease of males in Fiji especially in Indians. The male:female ratio varies from 4:1 to 12:1. The ethnic ratio of Indians:native Fijians was 13:1 although a ratio of 32:1 had been reported.

Each paper includes an introduction and review of literature, data presentation, discussion of data, conclusion and elaborate bibliography. Additional references and appendices with explanation are common features. For each major table the list of sources (authors) are indicated.

Such emphasis increases acknowledgement of researchers in the field. In a number of studies, data obtained are compared to data generated world-wide in similar studies on different ethnic groups. This increases the potential use of the book. In conclusion, this book would be very useful to public health nutritionists, epidemiologists, sociologists, and any other person interested in research in the area of food habits and ethnicity.

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Fundamentals of Clinical Nutrition**R.L. Weinsier and S.L. Morgan****London: Mosby Year Book Inc., 1993****ISBN 0-8016-6571-X, 196pp.**

There is a distinct lack of suitable clinical nutrition texts for medical students. This book can justifiably rank as one of the suitable – and indeed desirable – of such books. It is contemporary, succinct, clear and relevant. The presentation is attractive, with a differently coloured section on more systematic nutrient science, and coloured photographs (presumably the print run has been large enough and anticipatory of a significant market!).

Being American it only goes partway to use of SI (Scientifique Internationale) units (eg ounces, mg/dL, feet and inches (the latter with cms as well)).

The one area of particular difficulty for medical graduates is the acquisition of a knowledge about food, its chemistry, patterns of eating in the community, and ways of counselling. This book is embryonic, but encouraging in its development of these topics – dietary guidelines, and ‘good sources of micronutrients’ are examples of valuable material.

A sense of critical thinking in clinical nutrition, with

ability to prioritize a patient’s problem as nutrition or otherwise could have been done better, but may require a larger book. There are up-to-date references, including some key primary sources of information. And there are patient studies, which are particularly helpful.

The book successfully takes clinical nutrition further towards the successful diagnosis and management of non-communicable disease, beyond the areas of wasting disorders and nutrient deficiencies, important as these are. ‘Therapeutic diets’ may increasingly give way to ‘preferred ways of eating’ in recognition of a greater role for the application of principles (rather than prescriptions) and recruitment of patients’ own decision-making for successful food intake change. ‘Exchanges for diabetes’ do not fully acknowledge the ‘glycaemic indices’ of food and other considerations of relevance in the nutritional management of diabetes.

Elementary clinical-nutritional epidemiology is introduced and is a good beginning to an appreciation of the critical underpinning of clinical nutrition.

The book is no doubt one of a new generation of ‘discipline-defining’ books in clinical nutrition and very worthy of purchase.

Mark L. Wahlqvist

McCane and Widdowson: A scientific partnership of 60 years**Edited by Margaret Ashwell****British Nutrition Foundation. £19.95.**

**Published by the British Nutrition Foundation, High Holborn House,
52-54 High Holborn, London WC1V 6RQ.**

As reviewed by Mark L. Wahlqvist (in volume 2, issue 2, p. 101).



This photograph of (left to right) Elsie Widdowson, Don Cheek, Dan Stroud, Mark Wahlqvist and Boyd Strauss was omitted from the review of the above book, as published in issue 2 of this volume (see p. 101).

