

# Declaration of Olympia on nutrition and fitness

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The International Conferences on Nutrition and Fitness are held in Greece every four years in the spring prior to the Olympic Games. Following each conference, a declaration is developed at a special meeting at the International Olympic Academy to update advice on nutrition and fitness for all. The proceedings of the conferences are published in the scientific literature\*.

The Third International Conference on Nutrition and Fitness, was held at the Olympic Athletic Centre of Athens, "Spyros Louis" in Athens, May 24-27, 1996. Four hundred and eighty participants attended the conference from 31 countries. Following the conference, an international panel composed of members of the conference Executive Committee, along with the session chairs, met at the International Olympic Academy at Ancient Olympia to develop the "Declaration of Olympia on Nutrition and Fitness" for 1996.

This international panel agreed that on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Olympic Games, it is important to reaffirm the concepts of positive health postulated by Hippocrates and to reassess their relevance to the Olympic ideal and the health of the world's populations. The concept of positive health, as enunciated by Hippocrates, is based on the interaction of genetics, diet and physical activity.

*'Positive health requires a knowledge of man's primary constitution (which today we call genetics) and of the powers of various foods, both those natural to them and those resulting from human skill (today's processed food). But eating alone is not enough for health. There must also be exercise, of which the effects must likewise be known. The combination of these two things makes regimen, when proper attention is given to the season of the year, the changes of the winds, the age of the individual and the situation of his home. If there is any deficiency in food or exercise the body will fall sick.' (480 BC)*

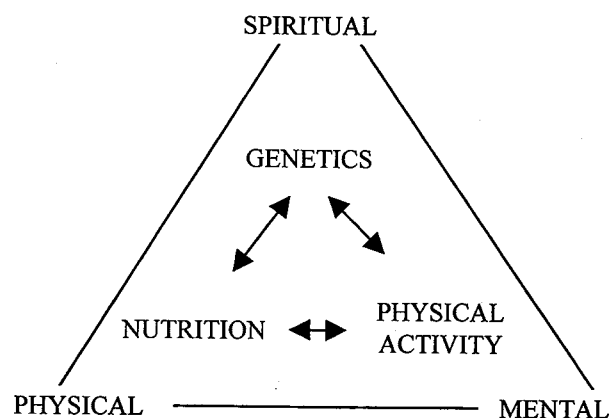
Among the Greeks, the concept of positive health was important and occupied much of their thinking. Those who had the means and the leisure applied themselves to maintaining positive health, which they often conceived aesthetically, and to this end put themselves into the hands of trainers who subjected them to regimen. Training for war and athletic competition was of course well known among them. Health was an excellence in its own right, the physical counterpart and condition of mental activation. The details of regimen practiced for health were an important part of Greek medicine. The concept of positive health may be represented by a triangle involving genetics, nutrition and physical activity, that influence the spiritual, mental and physical aspects of health (Figure 1).

### Declaration

1. Nutrition and physical activity interact in harmony and are the two most important positive factors that contribute to metabolic fitness and health interacting with the genetic endowment of the individual. Genes define opportunities for health and susceptibility to disease, while environmental factors determine which susceptible individuals will develop illness. Therefore, individual variation may need to be considered to achieve optimal health and to correct disorders associated with micronutrient deficiency, dietary imbalance and a sedentary lifestyle.

2. Every child and adult needs sufficient food and physical activity to express their genetic potential for growth, development, and health. Insufficient consumption of energy, protein, essential fatty acids, vitamins (particularly vitamins A, C, D, E and the B-complex) and minerals (particularly calcium, iron, iodine, potassium and zinc), and inadequate opportunities for physical activity impair the attainment of overall health and musculoskeletal function.

**Figure 1.** The interaction of genetics, nutrition and physical activity influences the spiritual, mental and physical aspects of health.



3. Balancing physical activity and good nutrition for fitness is best illustrated by the concept of energy intake and output. For sedentary populations, physical activity must be increased; for populations engaging in intense occupational and/or recreational physical activities, food consumption may need to be increased to balance their energy needs.

\* The proceedings of the Third International Conference on Nutrition and Fitness have been published in 2 volumes in the Karger series World Review of Nutrition and Dietetics. Volume 1 is entitled *Nutrition and Fitness: Evolutionary Aspects, Children's Health, Programs and Policies* and Volume 2 is entitled *Nutrition and Fitness: Metabolic and Behavioral Aspects in Health and Disease*. Contact: S Karger AG, Basel, Switzerland, Fax: +41-61-306-1234; Email: karger@karger.ch

4. Nutrient intakes should more closely match human evolutionary heritage. The choice of foods should lead to a diverse diet high in fruits and vegetables, and rich in essential nutrients, particularly protective antioxidants and essential fatty acids.

5. The current level of physical activity should match more closely our genetic endowment. Reestablishment of regular physical activity into everyday life on a daily basis is essential for physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. For all ages and both genders the physical activity should be appropriately vigorous and of sufficient duration, frequency, and intensity using large muscle groups rhythmically and repetitively. Special attention for adequate nutrition should be given to the competitive athletes.

6. The attainment of metabolic fitness through energy balance, good nutrition and physical activity, reduces the risk of and forms the treatment framework for many modern lifestyle diseases such as diabetes mellitus, hypertension, osteoporosis, some cancers, obesity, and cardiovascular disorders. Metabolic fitness maintains and improves musculoskeletal function, mobility, and the activities of daily living into old age.

7. Education regarding healthy nutrition and physical activity must begin early and continue throughout life. Nutrition and physical activity must be interwoven into the curriculum of school age children and of educators, nutritionists and other health professionals. Positive role models must be developed and promoted by society and the media.

8. Major personal behavioural changes supported by the family, the community, and societal resources are necessary to reject unhealthy lifestyles and to embrace an active lifestyle and good nutrition.

9. National governments and the private sector must coordinate their efforts to encourage good nutrition and physical

activity throughout the life cycle and thus increase the pool of physically fit individuals who emulate the Olympic ideal.

10. The ancient Greeks (Hellenes) attained a high level of civilization based on good nutrition, regular physical activity, and intellectual development. They strove for excellence in mind and body. Modern men, women, and children can emulate this Olympic ideal and become swifter, stronger, and fitter through regular physical activity and good nutrition.

The declaration has been translated into the Olympic languages of Chinese, French, Greek, Russian and Spanish. The ten points of the declaration have been printed in these languages. The Executive Committee wishes to encourage the translation and distribution of the declaration worldwide. The copyright is held by the Executive Committee of the Conference.

The declaration was developed at Ancient Olympia, May 28-29, 1996 by the following persons:

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