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“CSIRO Continues its Diet Hype”

Prominent dietary scientist, Dr Rosemary Stanton, “doubts” that CSIRO’s recently published second edition of *The CSIRO Total Wellbeing Diet* “has improved its science and safety” following criticism of claims made in the first edition that contributed to sales of over 700,000 copies.

Dr Stanton, a Visiting Fellow in the University of NSW’s School of Medicine, writes in the January/February edition of *Australasian Science* magazine, published today, a follow-up to her substantial analysis in the magazine’s October 2005 edition shortly after Book 1 was released, and a critical report and editorial in the international journal *Nature* on 22 December 2005.

These and other critics had attacked CSIRO’s claim that its diet was “scientifically proven”, but CSIRO scientists and executives defended it. Their claim is unchanged on the cover of Book 2. Dr Stanton acknowledges that “some issues are addressed in Book 2”, but concludes that results from CSIRO’s own tests “are like any other diet – and not worthy of CSIRO’s ‘scientifically proven’ tag on the covers of both its diet books.”

She finds it “refreshing that CSIRO admits it found no difference in weight loss between a higher protein and a higher carbohydrate diet when each was equally low in fat and kilojoules, and Book 2 now agrees that healthy weight loss can come from a high carbohydrate or vegetarian eating pattern. However, it still claims that a higher-protein, low-fat diet preserves muscle during weight loss, enhances loss of fat, improves vitamin B12 and iron status, and lowers triglycerides.”

However, Dr Stanton cites large international studies (“available before Book 2 was written”) with contrary conclusions to CSIRO’s and asks: “Might Book 3 acknowledge that other studies, including CSIRO’s, do not show greater loss of fat or preservation of muscle mass with a high protein diet?... Straightforward science shows that the higher levels of vitamin B12 and iron in CSIRO’s high protein diet occurred because they gave their high protein group beef, lamb and veal (the products of sponsors Meat and Livestock Australia), which are high in these nutrients, whereas the lower meat diet included only pork or chicken.”

She is especially concerned about CSIRO’s dismissal of “repeated links found by other researchers between a high intake of red meat and increased risk of colorectal cancer” and “alarm bells” ringing from a study of over 90,000 pre-menopausal women that reported elevated risk of breast cancers that are oestrogen- and progesterone-receptor positive”.

Summaries and quotations of selected passages for reporting or review are permissible provided AUSTRALASIAN SCIENCE MAGAZINE is credited as the source of this story.

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A photo of Dr Stanton is available.