

March 30, 2016

Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D.
Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
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Betsy L. Humphreys
Acting Director and Deputy Director
National Library of Medicine
Building 38, Room 2E17A
8600 Rockville Pike
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Dear Dr. Collins and Ms. Humphreys:

The undersigned scientists and physicians urge the National Library of Medicine (NLM) to increase the value of abstracts in PubMed by including information about authors' competing interests (sometimes called conflicts of interest).*

PubMed is a precious global resource. At great taxpayer expense (over \$300 million a year¹), NLM makes available at no charge millions of abstracts from thousands of scientific journals. Health professionals, scientists, librarians, journalists, and the general public throughout the world search that database hundreds of millions of times a year.

Scientific research provides a foundation for future research, public policies, the practice of medicine, and public discussion. But numerous studies have documented that industry-funded research is far more often than not associated with results supportive of the funders' interests.²

We strongly urge the NLM to require all journals listed in PubMed to provide information about funding sources and other possible competing interests in all abstracts. To facilitate research, the "competing interest" section should be fully searchable. Thus, PubMed would advise users about the entity or entities that funded the study and whether (a) the authors reported no competing interests; (b) the authors reported the competing interests; (c) the article did not include a competing-interests disclosure statement; or (d) the journal did not provide disclosure of funding sources or the authors' other competing interests.

Typical disclosures might read: (a) "This study was funded by the Veterans Administration and the authors reported no competing interests"; (b) "This study was funded by Pfizer Corp. John

* Our request also applies to Toxline and any other online databases that the NLM sponsors.

Smith reported receiving consulting fees from Pfizer Corp. and Dow Chemical Co. Joan Jones reported receiving research support from Procter & Gamble and speaking honoraria from 7 food and drug companies”; (c) “This study was funded by PepsiCo, and the journal did not include a competing-interests disclosure statement in the article”; (d) “This journal did not require disclosure of funding sources for articles or of competing interests of authors, if any.”

See the attached screen shot for an example from PubMed of how information about competing interests might appear in an abstract. The actual study also disclosed funding sources for the study. (That abstract apparently was posted accidentally and the information about competing interests subsequently was removed.)

For the great majority[†] of studies the format suggested above would be perfectly feasible and would add great value for researchers, practicing physicians, general readers, and others who use PubMed. The feasibility has increased over the past decade because more and more journals routinely provide information about funding and competing interests. Improved abstracts would provide users with concise, critical information that would help them evaluate the credibility of a study’s findings and conclusions. And the improved abstracts would provide scholars with an additional tool for analyzing the quality of published research. While some PubMed users have access to the full text of articles, many others, especially those not affiliated with research institutions, do not. Perhaps most importantly, it is critical that PubMed disclose competing interests to journalists, who disseminate findings to wider audiences and sometimes lack the training to evaluate the methodology, results, or conclusions of the studies they report on. And, of course, even many users who could access the complete articles, often only want to read abstracts.

We look forward to your response and would be pleased to discuss this matter in person. (*Please reply via mjacobson@cspinet.org*)

Sincerely,

[†] Occasionally, listing in a PubMed entry of all reported competing interests might be unrealistic when a paper has a large number of authors reporting them. Those PubMed entries could state: “Authors reported numerous competing interests; see publication [or [click here](#)] for details.”

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Center for Science in the Public Interest

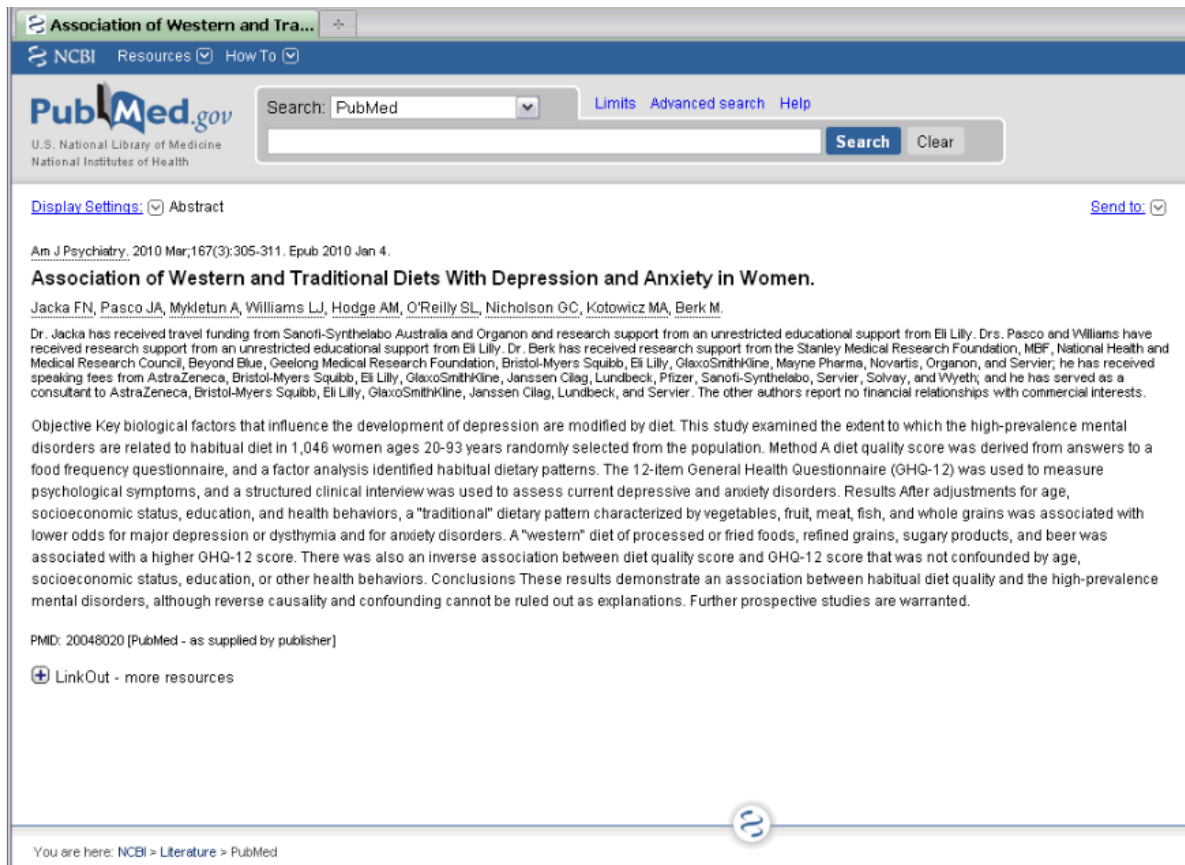
Environmental Working Group

Humane Society of the United States

Natural Resources Defense Council

Union of Concerned Scientists

World Public Health Nutrition Association



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying "Association of Western and Tra...". The page is from the NCBI (National Center for Biotechnology Information) website, specifically the PubMed.gov database. The search bar contains the text "PubMed". The page title is "Association of Western and Traditional Diets With Depression and Anxiety in Women." The authors listed are Jacka FN, Pasco JA, Mykletun A, Williams LJ, Hodge AM, O'Reilly SL, Nicholson GC, Kotowicz MA, and Berk M. The article is from the journal "Am J Psychiatry", published in 2010. The abstract text is visible, discussing the relationship between diet and mental health in women. The page also includes a "LinkOut" button and a breadcrumb trail at the bottom: "You are here: NCBI > Literature > PubMed".

Association of Western and Tra...

NCBI Resources How To

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Am J Psychiatry, 2010 Mar;167(3):305-311. Epub 2010 Jan 4.

Association of Western and Traditional Diets With Depression and Anxiety in Women.

Jacka FN, Pasco JA, Mykletun A, Williams LJ, Hodge AM, O'Reilly SL, Nicholson GC, Kotowicz MA, Berk M.

Dr. Jacka has received travel funding from Sanofi-Synthelabo Australia and Organon and research support from an unrestricted educational support from Eli Lilly. Drs. Pasco and Williams have received research support from an unrestricted educational support from Eli Lilly. Dr. Berk has received research support from the Stanley Medical Research Foundation, MRF, National Health and Medical Research Council, Beyond Blue, Geelong Medical Research Foundation, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Eli Lilly, GlaxoSmithKline, Mayne Pharma, Novartis, Organon, and Servier; he has received speaking fees from AstraZeneca, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Eli Lilly, GlaxoSmithKline, Janssen Cilag, Lundbeck, Pfizer, Sanofi-Synthelabo, Servier, Solvay, and Wyeth; and he has served as a consultant to AstraZeneca, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Eli Lilly, GlaxoSmithKline, Janssen Cilag, Lundbeck, and Servier. The other authors report no financial relationships with commercial interests.

Objective Key biological factors that influence the development of depression are modified by diet. This study examined the extent to which the high-prevalence mental disorders are related to habitual diet in 1,046 women ages 20-93 years randomly selected from the population. Method A diet quality score was derived from answers to a food frequency questionnaire, and a factor analysis identified habitual dietary patterns. The 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) was used to measure psychological symptoms, and a structured clinical interview was used to assess current depressive and anxiety disorders. Results After adjustments for age, socioeconomic status, education, and health behaviors, a "traditional" dietary pattern characterized by vegetables, fruit, meat, fish, and whole grains was associated with lower odds for major depression or dysthymia and for anxiety disorders. A "western" diet of processed or fried foods, refined grains, sugary products, and beer was associated with a higher GHQ-12 score. There was also an inverse association between diet quality score and GHQ-12 score that was not confounded by age, socioeconomic status, education, or other health behaviors. Conclusions These results demonstrate an association between habitual diet quality and the high-prevalence mental disorders, although reverse causality and confounding cannot be ruled out as explanations. Further prospective studies are warranted.

PMD: 20048020 [PubMed - as supplied by publisher]

LinkOut - more resources

You are here: NCBI > Literature > PubMed

Endnotes

¹ https://www.nlm.nih.gov/about/2015CJ_NLM.pdf

² See, e.g., A. Lundh, S. Sison, J. Lexchin, et al. Industry sponsorship and research outcome. The Cochrane Collaboration. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev.* 2012;12:MR000033. doi: 10.1002/14651858.MR000033.pub2. (finding in a review of 48 papers on drugs and medical devices, that “industry sponsored drug and device studies are more favorable to the sponsor’s products than non-industry sponsored drug and device studies due to biases that cannot be explained by standard risk of bias assessment tools.”);

L. Lesser, C. Ebbeling, et al., Relationship between funding source and conclusion among nutrition-related scientific articles. *PLoS Med.* 2007;4:41–6. (finding that studies sponsored exclusively by food /drinks companies were four to eight times more likely to have conclusions favorable to the financial interests of the sponsoring company than those which were not sponsored by food or drinks companies);

A. Huss, M. Egger, K. Hug, et al., Source of funding and results of studies of health effects of mobile phone use: systematic review of experimental studies. *Environ Health Perspect.* 2007;115:1–4 (finding that studies of the health effects of cellular telephone use that were “funded exclusively by industry...were least likely to report a statistically significant result.”);

P. Ridker, J. Torres. Reported outcomes in major cardiovascular clinical trials funded by for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, 2000-2005. *JAMA.* 2006;295:2270–4; 2726. (finding that recent cardiovascular trials funded by for-profit organizations are more likely to report positive findings than trials funded by non-for-profit organizations: while non-profits’ studies favored new treatments in 49 percent of case, studies funded by for-profits favored new treatments in 67 percent of studies, and approximately the same results held when only randomized trials were considered);

J. Levine, J.D. Gussow, D. Hastings, et al. Authors’ financial relationships with the food and beverage industry and their published positions on the fat substitute olestra. *Am J Public Health.* 2003;93:664–9. (finding that supportive authors were significantly more likely than critical or neutral authors to have financial relationships with Procter & Gamble, the manufacturer of olestra, (80% vs 11% and 21%, respectively; P <.0001). All authors disclosing an affiliation with P&G were supportive.)

M. Bes-Rastrollo, M. B. Schulze, M. Ruiz-Canela, et al. Financial conflicts of interest and reporting bias regarding the association between sugar-sweetened beverages and weight gain: a systematic review of systematic reviews. *PLoS Med.* 2013;10(12): e1001578. doi:10.1371/ journal.pmed.1001578 (finding that reviews with conflicts of interest were five times more likely to present a conclusion of no positive association than those without them.)

M. Nestle. More industry-funded studies with industry-favorable results. The score 140/12.

<http://www.foodpolitics.com/2016/03/more-industry-funded-studies-with-industry-favorable-results-the-score-14012/>