A report on nuts and heart health conducted by researchers affiliated with the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute, based at the University of Wollongong (UOW) campus, confirms that regular nut consumption can play a significant role in lowering the risk of death from heart disease.

The report represents a good example of translational research in the application of the newly-developed guidelines for general-level health claims issued by Food Standards Australia New Zealand.

The academic review, commissioned by Nuts for Life, a nutrition education initiative co-funded by the Australian Tree Nut Industry and Horticulture Innovation Australia, was undertaken by Landmark Nutrition, a Wollongong-based nutrition consultancy overseen by one of Australia’s leading nutrition academics, Professor Linda Tapsell AM, who also leads the IHMRI-affiliated Smart Foods Centre.

Professor Tapsell said that the development of formal processes for establishing health claims on foods has been over 10 years in the making and that the Wollongong team had made significant contributions to see it through to completion.

“Standards for making health claims are a significant development for food and nutrition communications,” said Professor Tapsell.

“It is all the more important when you hear so many commentators confusing the public with opinions lacking in scientific validity.”

The researchers examined more than 100 national and international studies spanning 20 years, finding that regular tree nut consumption was associated with lower cholesterol levels and lower risks of heart disease.

“Our review found that the associations with heart health were observed without adverse effects on weight gain and outcomes were shown to be sustained for periods as long as 20 years,” added Professor Tapsell.

Based on the new evidence and with reference to the Australian Dietary Guidelines, Nuts for Life is now recommending that Australians eat 30 grams (a handful) of nuts a day as part of a healthy diet (the Australian Health Survey 2011-13 indicated the average intake on a given day can be as low as 5-6g).

“Based on this body of research, nuts deliver important components to the diet and, as such, should be front of mind alongside fruit, vegetables and grains. This message is a good news translation of scientific evidence to practice,” concluded Professor Tapsell.

A summary of the report can be found at: http://www.nutsforlife.com.au/resources/literature-reviews-summaries/

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