

Nutrition, Health and Ageing

The Irish Section Conference 2020

The Nutrition Society's ever popular Irish Section Conference takes place for the first time at the University of Limerick, 17-19 June 2020. The conference will explore current issues relating to nutritional status in those chronic diseases associated with ageing populations, including metabolic health, declining cognitive function, and sarcopenia. Strategies to address these issues will also be a focus of discussion, including development of novel biomarkers of nutrient status, approaches to enhance screening and assessment, and implications for food and nutrition policy.

Ageing populations and nutrition

Over-65-year-olds are the fastest growing age group globally however global gains in life expectancy have not necessarily translated into an increase in years lived without disability and disease. Rather, the greatest proportion of healthcare expenditure is now concentrated in old age, with ageing a risk factor for a number of diseases, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, dementia and respiratory tract infections.¹

Immune system function declines with age, while loss of muscle mass increases. Although some degree of decline is inevitable, below a certain threshold of immune competence the risk of infection increases, and vaccination response decreases (for example to the flu vaccine).² Immune decline is greater in older people with low intakes (or status) of energy and micronutrients highlighting a clear role for nutrition. Similarly, those consuming low amounts of energy and protein are at an increased risk of sarcopenia. Sarcopenia is the progressive loss of skeletal muscle beyond the normal ageing process and often aggravated by lifestyle factors. It can severely affect a patient's quality of life and independence, predicting functional decline, hospitalisation, and even mortality.³

Although there is some evidence to suggest that probiotics and synbiotics may help to improve the host immune response,⁴ lifelong strategies are required given that those most resistant to interventions are often those with a greater loss of immunity – such as the elderly. The Mediterranean dietary pattern has also been suggested as a potential dietary intervention given the observed differences in chronic disease prevalence and longevity in those areas of the world adhering more closely to a Mediterranean style diet.

Improving health in old age (termed 'healthy ageing') and preventing accelerated functional decline is therefore an increasingly critical issue for policymakers and healthcare professionals globally.

The programme will explore various topics related to:

- Current nutritional issues influencing metabolic health
- The impact of gut microbiota on metabolic health
- Anthropometric, lifestyle and dietary concerns in ageing
- Strategies to improve nutrient status; current opinion and implications for nutrition policy.

Confirmed speakers

Speakers include Professor Hodson, Oxford University, UK, who will be discussing the disruption of metabolism in obesity focusing on insulin signalling and regulation of glucose and lipid metabolism; Professor Paul O'Toole, University College Cork, Ireland, will talk of the impact of gut microbiota on regulation of metabolic health. Professor Edith Feskens, Wageningen University, Netherlands, and Dr Audrey Tierney, University of Limerick, will also be talking about the Mediterranean diet and its impact on metabolic health and chronic disease.

To ensure the conference's focus on translating research into practice is explored, a symposium exploring strategies for improving nutrient status and the current opinions and implications for nutrition policy will also be held. Sessions during this conference will cover food reformulation and the resulting implications for both individuals and the food industry, malnutrition screening in clinical practice, and developing scientific recommendations specifically for older people to underpin public health nutrition policy and dietary guidelines.

Further details

- Abstract submission closes 27 March 2020.
- Early bird registration expires 20 May 2020.
- Applications for the Julie Wallace Award close 3 April 2020.

For further details on the Society's upcoming conferences visit:

www.nutritionssociety.org/conferences

References: **1.** WHO (2015). World report on Ageing and Health. Accessed online: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/186463/9789240694811_eng.pdf?sequence=1 (Jan 2020). **2.** The effect of ageing on thymic function. Accessed online: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fimmu.2013.00316> (Jan 2020). **3.** Sarcopenia, an emerging geriatric giant. Accessed online: www.gmjournals.co.uk/sarcopenia-an-emerging-geriatric-giant (Jan 2020). **4.** Immunity and ageing (2016). Effect of a synbiotic on the response to seasonal influenza vaccination is strongly influenced by degree of immunosenescence. Accessed online: <https://immunityageing.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12979-016-0061-4> (Jan 2020).

Events Calendar

March

- **18 March, Statistics for Nutrition Research workshop, London.** A one-day practical course covering experimental design, sample size and power calculations.

February

- **13-16 July, Summer Conference 2020, P&J TECA live, Aberdeen.** This year's topic is '*Protein: sources, benefits and global challenges*'.

February

- **8-9 September, Nutrition Futures, Coventry University**

Nutrition Society Journal Club – A one-hour monthly webinar discussion of recent research and free for all members. Register via your membership area.

Develop your CPD portfolio in 2020 – Pre-recorded versions of recent Nutrition Society Training Academy (NSTA) webinars (including on omega-3, sustainable diets, and iodine supplementation) are available to listen to at a variety of different times.