



# NUTRI NEWS

## The Department of Nutrition

June 2023

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### NEWS IN THE DEPARTMENT

#### Slower Progression of ALS Linked with Omega-3 Fatty Acids

According to a new study led by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health researchers, consuming omega-3 fatty acids—particularly alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), a nutrient found in foods including flaxseeds, walnuts, and chia, canola, and soybean oils—may help slow the progression of disease in patients with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS).

Lead author **Kjetil Bjornevik**, assistant professor of epidemiology and nutrition, states that “Prior findings from our research group have shown that a diet high in ALA and increased blood levels of this fatty acid may decrease the risk of developing ALS. In this study, we found that among people living with ALS, higher blood levels of ALA were also associated with a slower disease progression and a lower risk of death within the study period. These findings, along with our previous research, suggest that this fatty acid may have neuroprotective effects that could benefit people with ALS.”

Bjornevik and colleagues conducted a study among 449 people living with ALS who participated in a clinical trial. The severity of their symptoms and the progression of their disease were tested and then scored. The researchers measured the levels of omega-3 fatty acids in participants’ blood and participants were placed into four groups, from highest to lowest omega-3 fatty acid levels. There was an 18-month follow-up to track the groups’ physical functionality and survival according to the clinical trial.

Findings indicate that ALA showed the most benefits of all the omega-3 fatty acids, as it was most strongly linked to slower decline and decreased risk of death. Of the 126 participants who died within 18 months of the study’s onset, 33% belonged to the group with the lowest ALA levels, while 19% belonged to the group with the highest ALA levels. The researchers calculated, after adjusting for factors like age, sex, ethnicity, BMI, symptom duration, and family history of ALS, that participants with the highest levels of ALA had a 50% lower risk of death during the study period compared to participants with the lowest levels of ALA.

Two additional fatty acids, eicosapentaenoic acid, another omega-3 fatty acid found in fatty fish and fish oil, and linoleic acid, an omega-6 fatty acid found in vegetable oils, nuts, and seeds, were also associated with reductions in risk of death during the study period.

Senior author, **Alberto Ascherio**, professor of epidemiology and nutrition, says that “The link our study found between diet and ALS is intriguing. We are now reaching out to clinical investigators to promote a randomized trial to determine whether ALA is beneficial in people with ALS. Obtaining funding will be challenging, because ALA is not a patentable drug, but we hope to get it done.” **Marianna Cortese**, senior research scientist in the Department of Nutrition, was also a co-author.

“Plasma alpha-linolenic acid and ALS progression in the EMPOWER trial,” Kjetil Bjornevik, Marianna Cortese, Jeremy D. Furtado, Sabrina Paganoni, Michael A. Schwarzschild, Merit Cudkovicz, Alberto Ascherio, *Neurology*, June 21, 2023, doi: 10.1212/WNL.000000000207485

## NEW RESEARCH SCIENTIST APPOINTMENTS

**Dr Yang Hu** was appointed Research Scientist in the Department of Nutrition.

## NUTRITION SOURCE UPDATES

### Unpacking new guidelines on artificial sweeteners

A closer look at the World Health Organization's new guidelines on non-sugar sweeteners (often referred to as artificial or low-calorie sweeteners) – <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/2023/06/06/who-guidelines-non-sugar-sweeteners/>

### Healthy picnic tips

Whether you're hosting a backyard cookout, or planning a picnic on the go, be sure to fuel your family with summertime meals that are both nutritious and safe - <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-summer-picnic-tips/>

## MONDAY NUTRITION SEMINARS

The Department of Nutrition holds its weekly **Monday Nutrition Seminar Series** every Monday throughout the academic year. The talks are varied, but they highlight the many different aspects of cutting-edge research that is currently being conducted in the fields of nutrition, planetary nutrition, public health nutrition, and global public health. These seminars are held from **1:00-1:50 pm** and are free and open to the public. Because of COVID-19, most of the seminars have been presented via Zoom since March of 2020. Beginning this fall and continuing into the spring, our seminars will be more of a hybrid mix, with some in-person and others still virtual. The in-person seminars will also be on Zoom for those unable to attend. During the fall and spring semesters, live seminars will be held in FXB G-13. zoom link for viewing will be available one week prior to each seminar.

**Our Spring Monday Nutrition Seminar Series has concluded. Our Monday Seminars program will resume early next fall.**

## MORE NEWS IN THE DEPARTMENT



Federal partners from CDC, NIH, and USDA teamed up through the National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research (NCCOR) to identify gaps and future directions for dietary assessment methods for infants and toddlers. Check out the spotlight in [NCCOR's June newsletter](#) or read the [full publication in JAND](#). This work was led by our own **Meg Zimmer**, G1 PhD student.

### PUBLICATIONS

**Rebecca Mozaffarian**, Research Project Manager, and colleagues have published the following paper:

Mozaffarian RS, Carter S, Bovenzi MC, Kenney EL. Comparison of foods and beverages served and consumed in CACFP-participating childcare centers to national guidelines. *Public Health Nutr* 2023: 1-25.

### PRESENTATIONS



**Stephen Devries, MD**, Adjunct Associate Professor of Nutrition, was invited to speak on nutrition education in medicine at the "Advancing Food is Medicine Summit", a Food Tank event held June 20 in

collaboration with the White House in support of the National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health; and Tufts University. The session focused on Pillar 2 of the White House National Strategy: Collaborations to Integrate Nutrition and Health.

## Research Resource Highlight: Access to Non-Public Federal Microdata through the Boston Research Data Center

The Harvard Chan School recently purchased an institutional subscription to the [Boston Research Data Center](#) (BRDC), which greatly reduces the cost of accessing non-public federal microdata for School researchers. These microdata represent unit-level or otherwise highly-disaggregated data on individual persons or households and fine geographic units such as blocks or zip code.

The BRDC provides secure, on-premises access to perform statistical analyses on non-public microdata from 16 federal agencies including:

- Census Bureau, National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS)
- Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)
- Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)
- CDC National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality

Additional information on the data available, the process to access the facility, and additional costs that may apply can be found on our School's [BRDC information webpage](#).



Photo: Grammarly

## Nutrition Department Holds Annual Staff Retreat on June 21

The Department of Nutrition held its annual staff retreat on June 21, 2023, from 11 am to 2 pm. The retreat, which was virtual, focused on happiness and successful remote work techniques.

There were two different workshops, both led by **Trish Hart**, MBA, YACEP-500, BHI SMART Facilitator [<http://www.hartmindbodysolutions.com/>], with a lunch break in-between. Trish is experienced in working with the Harvard community and specializes in wellness workshops on stress management, remote work, burnout, self-care, mindfulness, meditation, breath work, and sleep hygiene. The approach that Trish used was a combination of mindfulness, evidence-based research findings, and experiential exercises, in which participants learned and experienced ways to become happier and more productive in both their work and home environments. In addition, they also learned the best practices for working at home, the science behind habit formation, and how to develop habits to be successful in their remote work environments. Each session began with a short mindfulness practice.

Research on happiness supports the finding that happy people feel better, do better and live better in all aspects of their lives. In the *Science of Happiness* workshop, participants explored the history and research behind this concept of happiness, how it relates to the various facets of their life, and what intentional activities they can do to increase life satisfaction and fulfillment. They also learned and experienced the basic principles to bring more happiness to their personal and professional life.

The *Power of Habits in a Remote Workspace* workshop was a powerful results-driven workshop which covered the neuroscience behind habit development, behavioral paradigms that support habit formation, and helped individuals build new habits or change old ones. Individuals were expected to leave with the tools to advance in their own lifestyle changes. In addition, this session was interactive and specifically addressed remote challenges, and healthy habit formation.

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The Department of Nutrition held its **9<sup>th</sup> Annual Omics Symposium: Advances, Applications, and Translation in Nutrition and Epidemiology** on June 8, 2023. Co-chaired by **Dr Frank Hu**, Fredrick J. Stare Professor of Nutrition and Epidemiology, and Chair, Department of Nutrition; and **Dr Miguel A. Martinez-Gonzalez**, Adjunct Professor of Nutrition, this was a hybrid event which took place in Kresge G-1 and livestreamed on zoom.





## RECIPE CORNER

By Hilary Farmer



Want to make a simple, easy, but quick meal on a hot summer's night with minimal effort? We thought up a good meal at my house that is not only highly nutritious but very delicious as well. During a recent trip to New Hampshire, we bought some basil pasta at a specialty store, then wondered what to do with it when we got back home. After mulling it over, we decided a nice complement to a basil pasta might be something simple yet highly flavorful, so we chose anchovies, garlic, olive oil, and some basil from our garden. Feel free to substitute the basil angel hair pasta with any flavor or type of pasta of your choice, and you might want to experiment with recipes of your own that use other ingredients.

### **INGREDIENTS:**

Pasta (use any pasta of your choice)  
Good olive oil (EVOO)  
Tin of good anchovies  
4 cloves of garlic  
Basil (fresh is better)  
Sprinkle parmesan cheese over dish when done

### **RECIPE INSTRUCTIONS:**

Cook pasta according to package instructions.  
Heat olive oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic, anchovy, and slowly cook until the anchovy dissolves.  
Stack the basil leaves and julienne them and toss into the mix.  
Add the cooked pasta and the basil and toss well.  
Liberally sprinkle with parmesan (or Romano) cheese.

Serve immediately. Goes well with fresh tomato salad from your garden.

**Do you have some favorite recipes of your own you'd like to share with the Department? *NutriNews* welcomes all recipe contributions, especially those from different cultures around the globe!**

**SAVE THE DATE!**

**18<sup>th</sup> Annual Stare-Hegsted Lecture**  
Department of Nutrition

**Should We Remove Wine from  
the Mediterranean Diet?**

**Miguel A. Martínez-González, MD, PhD, MPH**  
Professor, Preventive Medicine & Public Health, Univ. Navarra,  
Spain  
Adjunct Professor, Dept. Nutrition, Harvard TH Chan School of  
Public Health



**Monday, October 2, 2023**

**4:30-5:30 p.m.**

**Location TBD, Harvard Chan School**

*Reception at 5:45pm, FXB Atrium*



# SAVE THE DATE: NUTRITION 2023 RETURNS TO BOSTON JULY 22-25, 2023 (AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR NUTRITION)

The American Society for Nutrition is meeting in person this July in Boston.



## [NUTRITION 2023 - American Society for Nutrition](#)

You're invited to attend the preeminent meeting with leading research on the hottest topics in nutrition. Following three years of virtual meetings, NUTRITION 2023 will offer an opportunity for nutrition scientists, clinicians, policy experts, industry leaders, and more to break away from their screens and to gather, network, and share knowledge face-to-face.

[nutrition.org](http://nutrition.org)

## Harvard Chan School Nutrition Reception

**Sunday, July 23, 2023, 6:30-8:30PM**  
**Sheraton Boston**

**As part of the Nutrition 2023 Conference**

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We are delighted to invite you to an upcoming Harvard Chan School reception held in conjunction with [Nutrition 2023](#) held this year in Boston, July 22-25.

The Office for Alumni Relations and the Department of Nutrition is co-hosting a reception on **Sunday, July 23 at the Sheraton Boston, 6:30-8:30 PM**. The event promises to be a delightful evening filled with excellent food and beverages, including beer and wine.

We would like to extend a special invitation to Nutrition alumni living in the Boston area and hope you can attend and reconnect with fellow alumni and students from the school. This event is not just for alumni attending the Nutrition conference, but all graduates of the Nutrition department at Harvard Chan School.

The reception will be attended by Harvard Chan School faculty by the Department of Nutrition, including Frank Hu, department Chair, as well as many Nutrition alumni and current students.

[Please register for the event here by Thursday, July 20](#), and feel free to bring a guest. We look forward to seeing you there. RSVP to help us plan.