Food Prepared for Nutrition Research Atypical, but Tasty

Preparing food for a nutrition research study kind of goes against the grain for a dietitian who has spent most of her career encouraging clients to eat well-rounded diets containing lots of vegetables, whole grains, and fresh fruits. However volunteer participants in a study being conducted by Utah State University's Center for Advanced Nutrition (CAN) will be consuming gluten-free breads and muffins, carefully-controlled portions of vegetables, and fruits from a limited array of sources.

Senior Dietitian Sheryl Aguilar fine tunes recipes to meet strict criteria for meals prepared for nutrition research by CAN's Human Nutrition Research Group.

But dietitian Sheryl Aguilar, who guides the meal preparation for CAN's Human Nutrition Research Center, can handle the challenge. "It's an important study that could make a real difference in the lives of people who have elevated cholesterol levels," she said, "and it's a great experience for students in the nutrition field. Plus, the food actually tastes pretty good!"

The Phyto Study is the third leg of research being funded by the National Institute on Health and is being conducted at USU and Washington University. Dr. Michael Lefevre, USTAR Professor at USU, has participated in the prior two segments and was delighted that this third section followed him after he arrived last fall.

"This study could provide some important and exciting new information about the body's protective mechanism for blocking cholesterol uptake." Lefevre reported. "Additionally, we may be able to confirm that combining high-phytosterol foods with ezetimibe may be an effective way to lower both cholesterol levels and the use of prescription medicines. Fortunately, many common foods are high in phytosterols."

Participants are currently being recruited for this study which will look at the effectiveness of combining foods containing phytosterols with an FDA-approved substance, ezetimibe. Both substances are known to reduce cholesterol absorption, and it is suspected, but not verified, that each works in a different way in the digestive tract. This study seeks to make that determination by controlling the level of consumed phytosterols and then measuring any change of cholesterol levels between those who are on a phytosterol-only diet, those taking just ezetimibe, and those who have a combination of both. The presumption is that the diet with both substances will provide increased protection if activity occurs at different locations in the digestive system.

Volunteers can range from the ages of 18 to 80 and must meet some basic requirements, among which is an above-ideal LDL cholesterol (over 100), but participants cannot be on medication to lower it. There are other restrictions for this particular study, but individuals are encouraged to apply for a pre-screening where information will be gathered and blood tests administered to determine eligibility. Whether or not they qualify, they will be given the option to have their information filed for consideration to participate in other upcoming trials.

In addition to having the experience of participating in important nutrition research, participants will receive $500 for agreeing to eat only the meals prepared by CAN for a period of 9 weeks and taking part in regular medical reviews, including blood tests. The medical portion is overseen by Clinic Coordinator, Janet Bergeson.

There will be three 21-day periods where volunteers will eat breakfast at the Junction on USU's campus, be given a prepared lunch, then return for the evening meal. The staff will supply weekend meals to take home. There will be a break of about a week between each 21-day period, for a total of approximately 12 weeks of involvement. The schedule is flexible enough to accommodate holiday periods.

Those who are interested in being considered for this or future studies can apply on-line at www.can.usu.edu, or information is available at (435)-797-2446 (ICAN).