Total individual macronutrient intake

Overview

Total individual macronutrient intake is a member of the class of indicators that measure individual intake of nutrients. It quantifies the percentage of caloric intake from the three major macronutrient groups: protein, fats, and carbohydrates. These three nutrients have distinct and important functions in the body, and all are necessary for proper growth, development and cognitive and physical functioning. Both undernutrition and overnutrition due to improper macronutrient intake, and the related health complications, continue to be a major health concern in the developing world (Muller & Krawinkel, 2005 [1]). Other indicators included in the Data4Diets platform that measure individual nutrient intake include Nutrient Adequacy Ratio (NAR), Mean Adequacy Ratio [2](MAR), probability of inadequacy of specific micronutrient intake [3] or Mean Probability of Adequacy (MPA) across several micronutrients, total individual micronutrient intake [4], and total individual energy intake [5]. For more discussion on the comparative uses of these indicators, refer to the ‘Uses’ section below.

Method of Construction

In order to estimate an individual’s caloric intake from the three macronutrients, survey data must be collected from a 24-Hour Dietary Recall [6], a Weighed Food Record [7], or a Food Frequency Questionnaire [8] (FFQ). Population mean consumption can be estimated with a single survey, but the survey must be repeated on at least a subsample of the survey population for two non-consecutive days of intake to estimate ‘usual intake’ (IOM 2000 [9]). This should be completed in a way such that the final sample is representative of all days of the week. Using a Food Composition Table (FCT) and the weight (grams) of the foods consumed, an estimate of the amount of protein, fat, and carbohydrates consumed per subject is calculated (distinguishing between fiber and other forms of carbohydrates). The total grams of each macronutrient are added together, and the caloric value of each is calculated using the following equation:

\[
\text{Calories (Kcal)} = [\text{Protein (g)} \times 4] + [\text{Fats (g)} \times 9] + [\text{Av. Carbohydrates (g)} \times 4] + [\text{Fiber (g)} \times 2] + [\text{Alcohol (g)} \times 7]
\]

*Note in this equation, Total Carbohydrates = [Available Carbohydrates + Fiber]*

Finally, the proportion of calories from each macronutrient is calculated by dividing the calories from each by the total calories consumed. For more information on calculating this indicator, refer to the first method discussed in the ‘New Methods Considered’ section of the following paper published in the Journal of Food Composition and Analysis (Schakel et al., 2009 [10]).
**Uses**

Individual macronutrient intake is a useful indicator for understanding the dietary intake and quality (especially balance) of population subgroups, such as pregnant and lactating women, and for understanding the allocation of food resources among household members (Ferro-Luzzi 2002 [11]). These data can also contextualize shifting diet composition that has been observed in conjunction with demographic and economic transition in low- and middle-income countries, as individuals consume a higher percentage of their calories from fat (Popkin 2001 [12]). When expressed as percentages of total energy intake, the information provided is limited and should therefore be complemented by the total intakes in energy and the intake of each macronutrient in grams. In addition, since this indicator does not include information on micronutrient intake, it is not useful for capturing a full picture of dietary quality. More inclusive indicators such as the NAR, MAR [2], probability of inadequacy [3] or MPA are more appropriate for using individual nutrient intake data to provide a picture of the diet as a whole.

**Strengths and Weaknesses**

An advantage of this indicator is that it allows researchers to estimate an individual’s intake of specific macronutrients and in gathering data on individual intake, researchers are able to pair findings with individual health outcomes and demographic information, such as religion, age, sex, education, or any other characteristics of interest, assuming the study has been designed for these purposes (Ferro-Luzzi 2002 [11]). However, a weakness of this indicator is that it does not provide information on the diet as a whole and whether intake levels are adequate and within a healthy range (IOM 2000 [9]).

**Data Source**

Intake data can be obtained from 24-Hour Dietary Recall [6], Weighed Food Records [7] and FFQs [8]. The FAO/WHO Global Individual Food consumption data Tool (FAO/WHO GIFT [13]) is a source for individual level quantitative dietary data. The FAO/WHO GIFT aims to make publically available existing quantitative individual food consumption data from countries all over the world. National or regional Food Composition Tables should be used to identify the nutrient contents of the foods and can be found at Food and Agriculture’s (FAO) International Network of Food Data Systems (INFOODS [14]) or the International Life Science Institute’s (ILSI) World Nutrient Databases for Dietary Studies (WNDDS [15]). RDAs can be obtained from the Institute of Medicine (IOM 2006 [16]). In addition, Food Balance Sheet [17] (FBS) data could be used to calculate a similar indicator, such as national average supply of protein [18]. Alternatively, Household Consumption and Expenditure Survey [19] (HCES) data could be used to calculate household share of dietary energy from different macronutrients [20].

**Links to guidelines**

Links to validation studies

- Basiotis et al., (1987). "Number of days of food intake records required to estimate individual and group nutrient intakes with defined confidence?" [22]

Links to illustrative analyses


Expert review conducted by:

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Food Security Dimensions

- Quantity [27]
- Quality [28]

Data Collection Levels

- Individual [29]

Data Sources and Methods

- 24-Hour Dietary Recall (24HR)
- Weighed Food Record (WFR)
- Food Frequency Questionnaire (FFQ)
- Food Composition Databases

Requires Food Composition Database

- Yes [30]