



## Foreword

The Institute of European Food Studies (IEFS) was established in 1995 under the auspices of the Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance (IUNA) which is comprised of the academic nutrition units of University College Cork, Trinity College Dublin and the University of Ulster. The research programme focuses on three areas: understanding consumer attitudes to nutrition and physical activity; food chemical intake studies in risk assessment; and food and nutrition policy. Reports on these areas are available at [www.iefs.org](http://www.iefs.org). The institute's research income comes from industry (Coca-Cola, Danone, Golden Vale, Greencore, Guinness Ireland, Kraft Jacob Suchard, Mars, Nestlé, Pepsi-Cola, Pfizer, Sucralose and Unilever), the European Commission (DGV) and the Department of Agriculture and Food in Dublin, through EU structural funds.

People are spending an increasing amount of their time being physically inactive, both at work and in their leisure time. This presents a considerable challenge to those involved in the promotion of a more physically active lifestyle. In encouraging more people to be physically active, it is necessary to be aware of the determinants of physical activity behaviour. One of these includes knowledge and attitudes towards physical activity. There have only been a few studies in Europe and all of these have looked at attitudes in relation to physical activity/exercise. While there are many programmes in different member states of the EU to tackle the rising prevalence of obesity, most do so in the absence of a knowledge of the attitudes towards physical activity.

In March–April 1997 the IEFS, co-funded by DGV, conducted the first pan-EU survey on consumer attitudes to physical activity, body weight and health. In addition to attitudes, the survey also measured (through self-reporting) prevailing levels of activity, inactivity and body weight/heights. This special issue

of *Public Health Nutrition*, through a series of papers covering different aspects of the survey, examines the degree of variability which exists both geographically and demographically in attitudes and activity levels. It also examines attitudes towards physical activity by activity level and by body weight (body mass index). Such data will benefit those involved in the promotion of physical activity by helping them to target their messages more effectively, thereby leading to more successful health promotion campaigns. This study complements the earlier pan-EU survey of consumer attitudes to food, nutrition and health which was also carried out by the IEFS (*European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 1997, **51**, Suppl. 2).

There are many people who should be thanked for their contribution to the study. There is the Project Management Group and the authors of the various papers whose names are recorded in this special edition. A most valuable contribution of the Institute's Scientific Advisory Committee must be gratefully acknowledged: Professor N Binns, UK; Dr E Fern, Switzerland; Professor J Hautvast, Netherlands; Professor A Jackson, UK; Professor A Kafatos, Greece; Professor JA Martinez, Spain; Dr G Pascal, France; and Professor HJF Zunft, Germany. Thanks are also due to the staff of MRBI in Dublin who coordinated the omnibus survey with particular thanks due to Ms C Hayes for her contribution. Advice on statistical analysis was gratefully received from DA Dunne of University College Dublin. Thanks are due to the team at IEFS in Dublin and Professor A Flynn (University College Cork) for his meticulous review of the manuscripts and to Jo Gibney (IEFS) who oversaw all aspects of the daunting administrative task of this complex project. Finally, to the Project Management Group, sincere thanks are due for their hard work, their rigid adherence to deadlines and their warm friendship throughout the study.

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