

Press release

Social inequalities in health linked to diet and physical activity *A collective expert review by Inserm*

Major social inequalities in health exist in France like other countries. These are reflected in varying rates of morbidity and mortality depending on individuals' position on the socio-economic scale. For example, at 35, senior executives' life expectancy is 6 years longer than that of manual workers. Lifestyle habits such as drinking, smoking, diet and physical activity are recognised as key determiners of health. A social gradient exists for health-related behaviour which manifests in childhood and lasts until old age.

One of the new focuses of the third period of the Programme National Nutrition-Santé [National Nutrition and Health Programme] (PNNS) (2011-2015) is to minimise social inequalities in health linked to diet (diet and physical activity). In this context, the Direction Générale de la Santé [Directorate General for Healthcare] (DGS) has asked Inserm to perform a review of scientific knowledge on social differentiation determiners in the area of nutrition and of the various intervention strategies that could be used to limit these inequalities.

In response to this request, Inserm formed a multidisciplinary group of experts on epidemiology, public health, human and social sciences, health economics, clinical research and geography.

The experts' analysis of data from recent international scientific literature was used to evaluate nutritional disparities based on individuals' socio-economic standing. The social, cultural, economic and environmental factors involved in creating social inequalities in nutrition were analysed. The experts also studied the impact of interventions and prevention policies based on socio-economic standing and identified the most effective strategies for limiting social inequality in the area of diet and physical activity.

In conclusion, the experts recommend designing and promoting programmes which benefit the entire population as well as actions targeting various social groups based on the risks and requirements they face.

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This expert review was coordinated by the "collective expert review" unit attached to ITMO Public Health (Multi-organisation Thematic Institute dedicated to Public Health).

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