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AICR STATEMENT

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*"This study merely confirms what we've known for some time: 'total fat' is not the issue. Different kinds of fat affect tumor progression and other aspects of the cancer process in different ways that demand further research. While we continue to investigate these connections, people should continue to eat more **fruits**, **vegetables** and whole **grains**, increase their physical activity and watch their weight."*

-- Karen Collins, RD, AICR Nutrition Advisor

New Fat-Cancer Study Underscores an Important Evolution (Not a Revolution) in Scientific Thinking

The latest clinical trial results from a large study called the Women's Health Initiative (WHI), were published today, February 8, in three separate papers in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*. The study divided more than 48,000 women aged 60 and over into two groups -- one control group that followed their normal dietary pattern, and one group that was instructed to lower their total fat intake so that only 20 percent of their daily calorie intake came from fat.

The three papers published in *JAMA* today found no significant difference in rates of colorectal cancer, stroke, and heart disease between the low-fat group and the control group. The low-fat group did show a small -- but not statistically significant -- reduction of risk for breast cancer.

Much of today's media coverage has characterized these studies as "overturning" the "long-held conviction" that total fat intake influences cancer and other diseases.

In fact, the new findings simply mirror the steady advances in scientific understanding that have taken place since the WHI study was designed and launched in the early 1990's. Research conducted in the 1980's focused on high overall fat intake as a risk factor for many diseases. The study was designed to test this theory.

During the years the WHI has been gathering its data, however, the story on fat and cancer has become clearer and more precise. Results from laboratory studies, population studies and clinical trials have increasingly revealed that different kinds of fat influence health in general -- and cancer in particular -- in radically different ways.

The WHI study was simply not designed to track the divergent influences of different kinds of fat (saturated and trans-fats vs. fats from vegetable oil, nuts and fish.) Nor was it designed to study other factors only now attracting considerable scientific attention, such as how **time of life** influences the interaction of diet and cancer risk, the influences of **weight** and **exercise**, the role of **genetic variation** among individuals, and the specific effect of **whole grains**.

The study also reinforces another fact that has emerged over the past decade: it is **overall calorie intake**, not fat alone, that plays a central role in risk for obesity and diseases related to it, such as cancer.

The bottom line: the WHI study is an important contribution to the scientific literature, but it does not close the book on fat and cancer. Instead, it simply serves to underline an important paragraph, which reads:

The best strategy for lowering risk for cancer and other diseases is to consume a diet high in a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and beans, low in saturated and trans-fats, maintain a healthy weight, and stay physically active.