

## Book reviews

*Introduction to Nutrition and Health Research.* Eunsook T. Koh and Willis L. Owen. Boston, MA, USA: Kluwer Academic Publishers. 2000. Hardback \$127.00, £89.00. ISBN 0-7923-7983-7

Think of the ten questions most asked by undergraduate students of nutrition. Think of the five questions most asked by postgraduates. Think of the new research assistant...

The answers lie here in the simplest of fashions in this text on research methods. Slowly and gently, the answers and guidance to all those irritating queries are laid out in a logical, calm and well-communicated form. In part one the book provides a step-by-step guide on research theory (rationalistic *v.* empirical), defining the research problem, literature reviews, critical evaluation, hypothesis, methods and ethics. Even at this stage the text is peppered with examples from published nutrition work, possible research questions, examples of interesting titles and references to papers that you feel you should have read. The examples range from food and diet issues to biochemistry, all useful and with surprisingly interesting subjects and studies. The overall message is that even the greatest nutritionists follow classic approaches, they all started somewhere and here is the opportunity for the student. If the student wasn't curious about nutrition before opening the book, they should be by the time they reach part two.

Basic statistics and measurements often panic the calmest and most capable students. Part two (Statistical and measurement concepts in research) is a good basic introduction to the main statistical tests, their meaning and limitations. Examples are well presented with worked formulas and applicable in many disciplines. More specialised dietary methodology is addressed including group and individual data, validity in dietary assessment methods, use of biochemical markers, anthropometric assessment and clinical assessment.

Part three tackles writing the research proposal and results. This is a very useful guide to writing a dissertation and an introduction to writing research proposals. Given the extraordinary number of problems students seem to have with writing, this chapter outlines a great selection of figures and ways of presenting data. Tackling the discussion is also broken into manageable chunks and finally there is guidance on the abstract (useful for all new Nutrition Society members struggling with where to begin). The final chapter in this section is almost like a graduation chapter (now you've done your thesis what about applying for grants). The content is based around a National Institute of Health submission which is probably as good a testing ground as any, especially the salutary section on why grant proposals fail.

The final section is on using computers in research (data entry software, graphical software, statistical software, data

analysis), which I think is best taught as a 'hands on' rather than text approach, but still a brave attempt and back up for the student nervous of computers (can there still be any out there?).

All in all a well laid out text with a summary at the end of each chapter, good referencing, excellent examples and pure encouragement for the novice. There are limitations, including the North American approach, which is evident in the papers cited, journals quoted and web sites mentioned. Overall, a real lack of literature databases, no BIDS and PubMed, certainly one area which needs expanding. The sections covering qualitative methodology are very scanty and can almost be missed. I guess this finding reflects the general trend by nutritionists to ignore social science methods, a great failing for those interested in the processes of dietary intervention. Ultimately this is an introductory text and provides a great flavour for the systematic approach one must take in research routes. The career scientist however, would be quickly searching out more references to expand his/her knowledge and understanding. A great book for recommending to students when the questions about dissertations start and confidence fails. Also, I suspect, a good book to throw at the student who 'doesn't know where to start'. In fact, this text could save the tutor a good hour of supervisory time and that's when the decisions about the cost need to be made.

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*Calcium Hunger.* Jay Schulkin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001. pp. 206. UK Paperback £17.95. ISBN 0-521-79551-6. Hardback £50.00. ISBN 0-521-79170-7.

Ca has been described as 'the most important inorganic element in the body'. It is certainly the most abundant mineral, accounting for 22.4 g/kg fat-free body tissue. That is to say that the body of an average 70 kg man with 15 % of his body weight as fat, would contain 1.33 kg Ca. Of this, 99 % would be present in the skeleton, with the remaining 1 % distributed between the extra- and intracellular fluids. The concentration in the plasma is one of the most closely controlled plasma variables, while intracellular Ca regulates a number of essential functions, exocrine- and endocrine-gland secretion of hormones, cyclic nucleotide metabolism, chromosome movement and initiation of DNA synthesis.

The author's aim was to provide a context in which behaviour, hormonal and physiological mechanisms for regulation of Ca can be understood. The reader is introduced to an understanding of how the brain orchestrates