

## ASSESSING DIETARY CHANGE IN A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

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### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to highlight some of the difficulties associated with examining complex human behaviours in longitudinal studies. I am particularly interested in assessing changes in human dietary consumption patterns over time.

Difficulties arise not only because of the between-person variability but also because of the inherent day-to-day *within*-person variability associated with dietary consumption practices.

The issue becomes even more complex with the additional qualification of studying dietary *change* as this necessitates a means of determining whether or not a significant change has in fact occurred given the between and within person variability cited above. These issues are often poorly considered in studies of dietary change.

### STUDY AIM

The primary aim of the study is to explore factors influencing dietary change in a prospective "naturalistic" (ie *no* intervention is given by the investigator) household based study.

The fundamental implication of this aim is that it requires a means of determining whether or not true "change" has occurred.

### METHODOLOGY

As outlined above the study design is prospective and will examine the influences on dietary consumption practices over a 12 month period. Data collection commenced in June 1990.

The study population can be subdivided into two groups: