

A 'Cinderella' public health dimension: the socio-cultural determinants of a taste for healthy food

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Economic versus cultural explanations

The nutrition transition: changes to food supply and consumer preferences: availability, affordability, accessibility

Lang and Rayner (2007): The nutrition transition is outcome of 3 transitions, including culture

Obesity as an outcome of 3 transitions

- Nutrition (Barry Popkin): increase in diets high in meat, fats, sugar and refined carbohydrates and low in fruit and veg
- Physical activity (Jules Pretty): decrease in energy expenditure due to increase in labour saving technologies
- Cultural (Claude Fischler): food-related knowledge, attitudes & practices change as markets dominate everyday life and community traditions recede

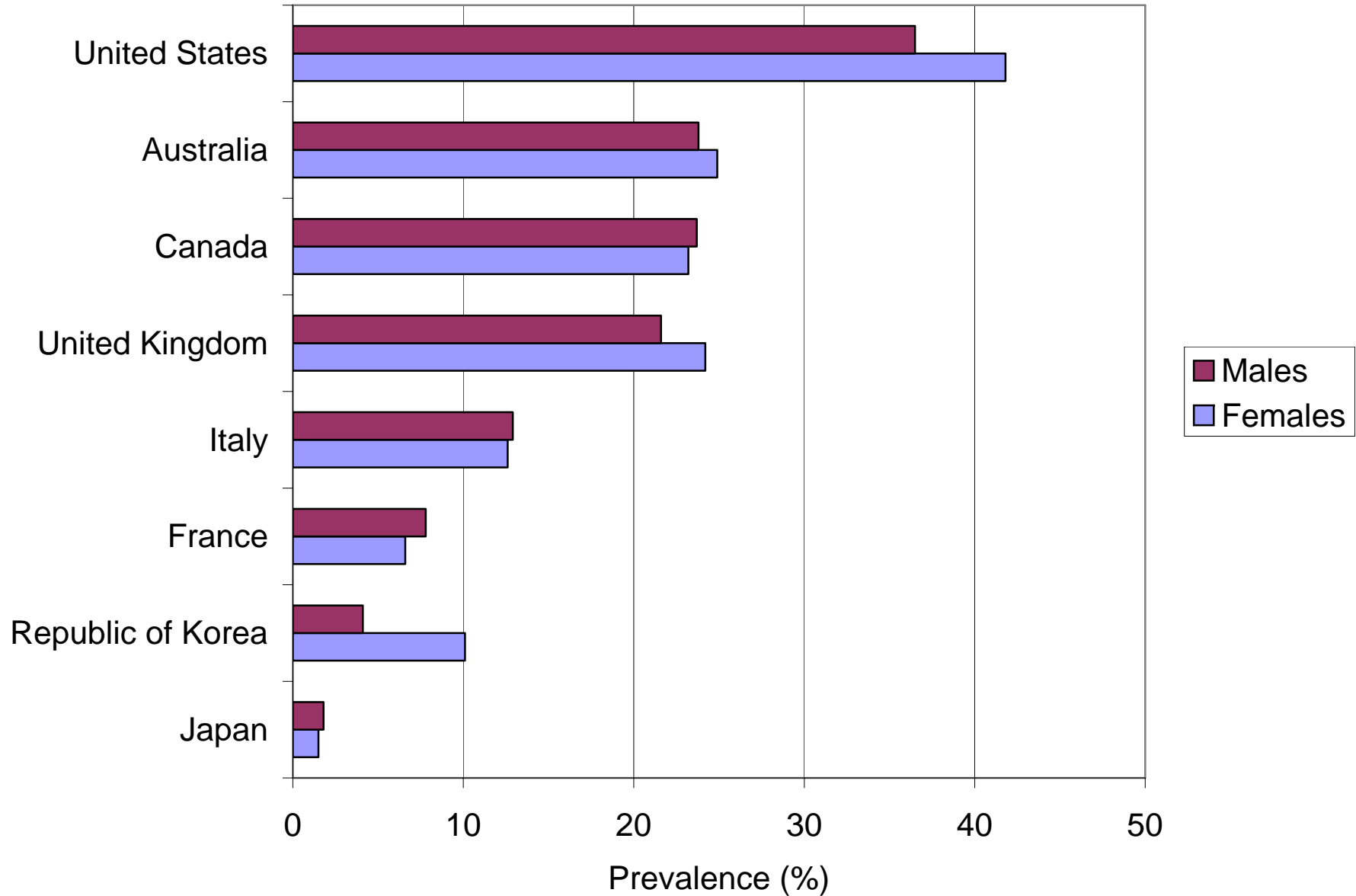
What is culture?

- Habitual and routinely practiced way of life
- Feels comfortable because of durability & familiarity
- Widely accepted (based on shared understanding, language meaning, history, etc)

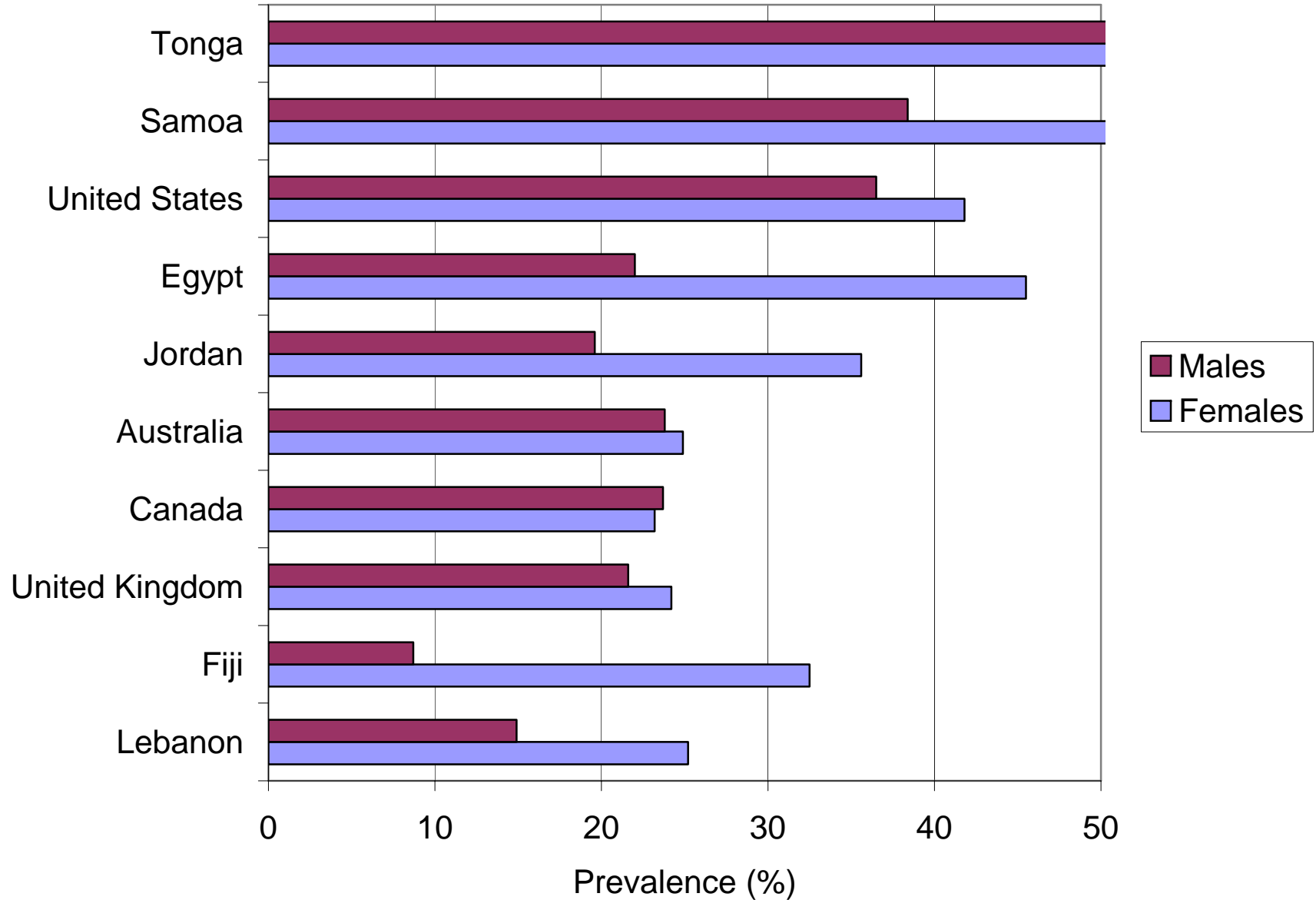
Cross-national BMI comparisons

Under what circumstances does 'culture' act as a risk factor for diet-related disease?

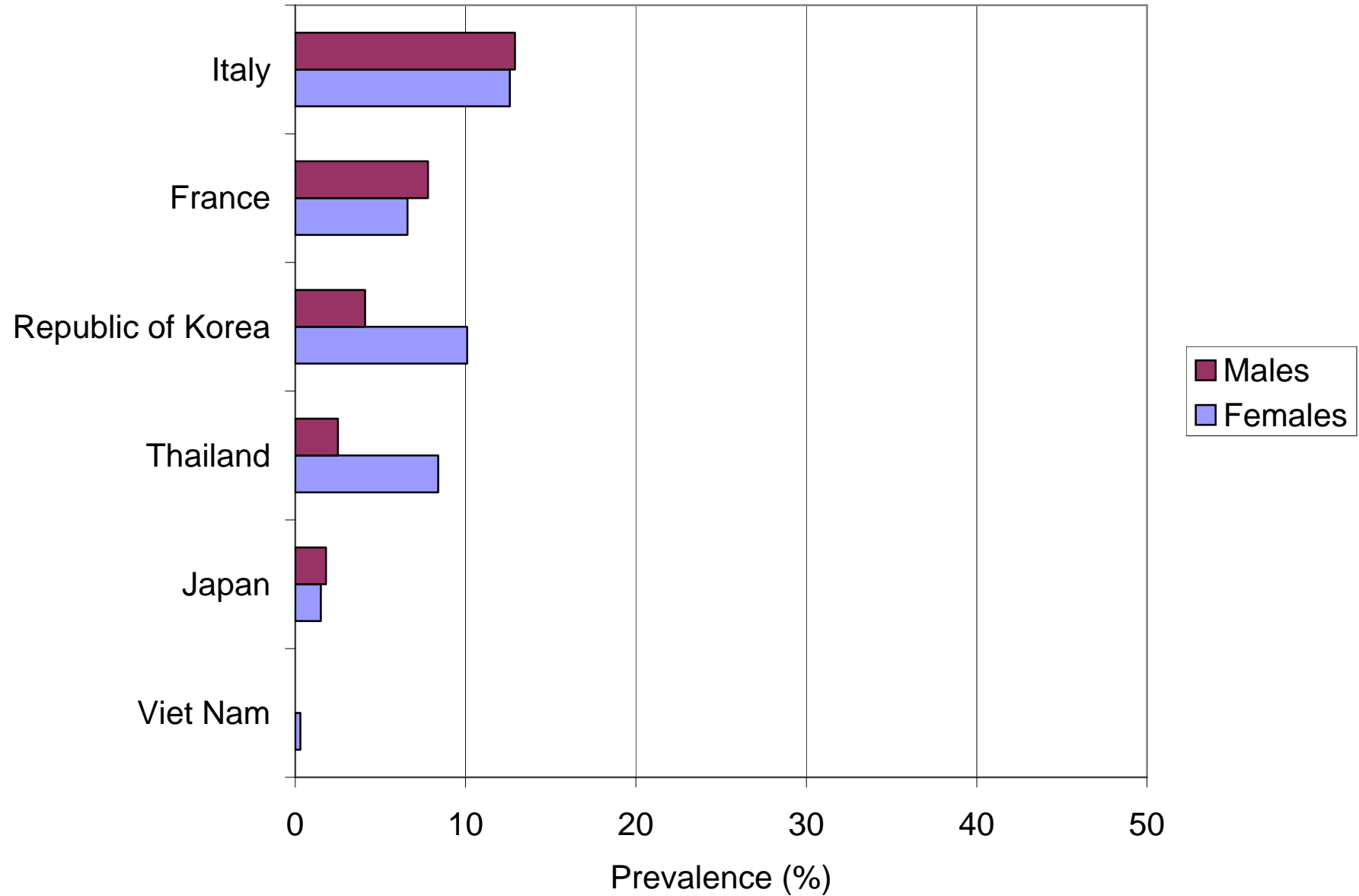
Obesity within the OECD



Cross-section of the most obese nations



'Strong' culinary cultures & BMI



Rigid practices counterbalance acceptability of 'new' diets

- French meals: moderate amounts of wine consumed with food, plenty of plants & low levels of snacking between meals (Ferrieres 2004; Rozin et al. 2003)
- *Italian meal-times: primo plate (complex carbo), secondo plate (protein & salad/veg) eaten at table
- *Japanese regimentation around daily dietary diversity & daily/festive rituals marked by scarcity, frugality & simplicity
- South Korean salutation: "have you eaten rice yet"? (Kim et al. 2000)
- *Compare with UK, where the food culture = diversity/few patterns

(from * *Food culture around the world Series*, ed. K. Albala)

Economics and / or culture?

2 economic drivers of obesity risk

1. Accessible and affordable energy-dense foods
2. Departure from healthy diets by lower SES groups

1. Accessible and affordable energy-dense foods

Australia: an industrial eaters' paradise

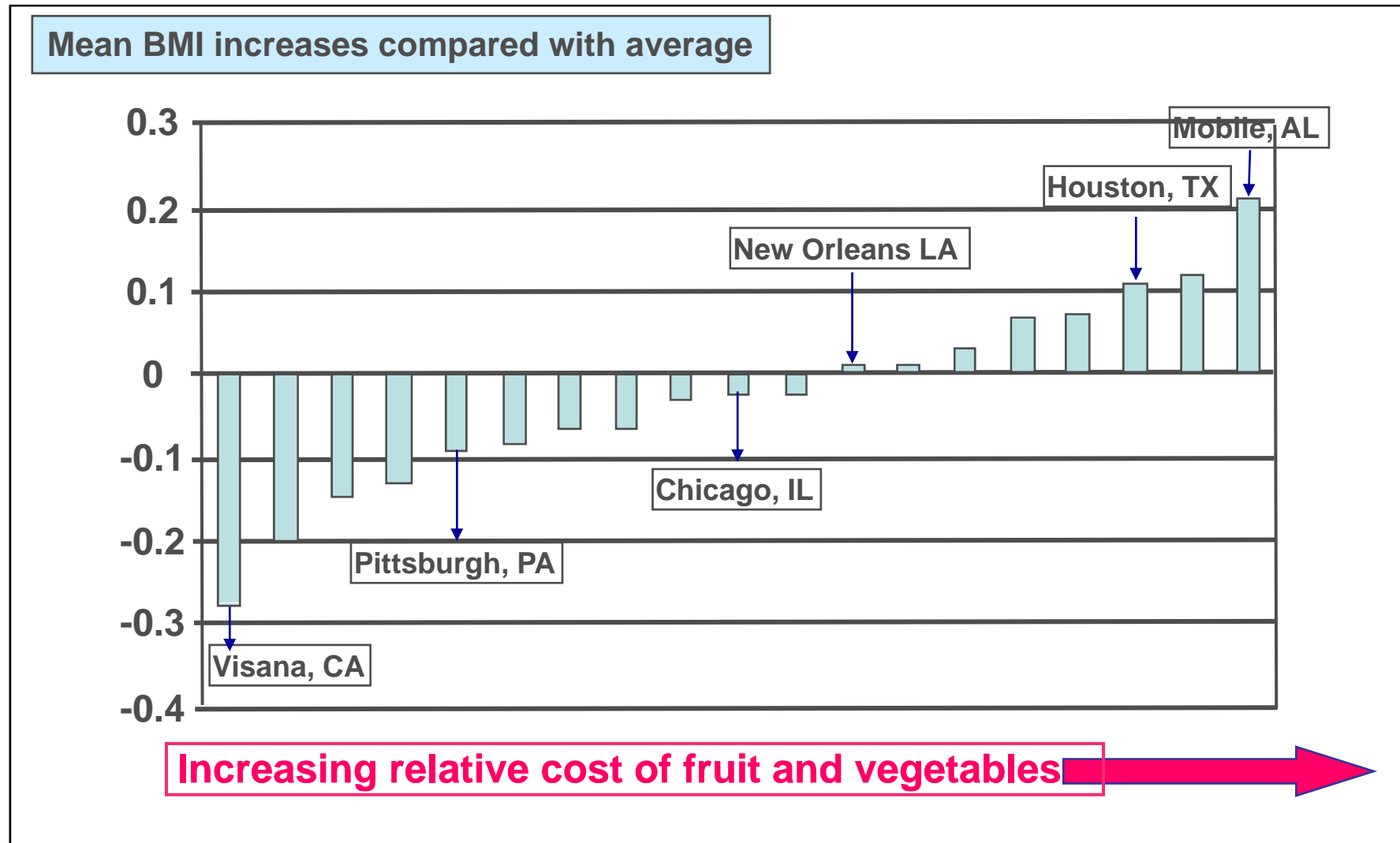
The 2 As of fast food: accessible & affordable

- Fast food provision is greater in more deprived areas (Reidpath et al 2002; Burns et al 2006)
- Accessibility to fast food restaurants is predictive of their use (Ulijazsek 2007)
- Energy-dense foods cost relatively less than nutrient-dense foods (Drewnowski 2004)
- Foods purchased from fast-food outlets are up to 65% more energy dense than the average diet (Jones et al 2007)

The 1 A of fruit & veg: accessible

- In the UK and Australia, lower SES groups have about the same access to similarly priced fruit and vegetables as other groups (Jones et al 2007; Winkler et al 2005)
- BUT, unlike fruit and vegetables, the cost of processed foods – soft drinks etc – has dropped relative to the CPI (Q'land Health 2006)
- Between 2000-2006, Healthy Food Basket has risen 49% compared to 32.5% CPI increase for food (Q'land Health 2007)

Real food prices and early childhood obesity



Adapted from Sturm & Datar 2005.

2. Departure from healthy diets by lower SES groups

The uneven nutrition transition

...the diets of whole populations are converging towards a similar but limited mix of food groups with dietary diversity, or divergence, confined to wealthier and better educated groups (Hawkes 2006)

SES and healthy diets

- Despite fresh food availability, dietary cluster analysis in the UK reveals that lower SES groups tend to eat less healthy diets and have inferior nutritional intakes (Pryer et al 2001; Martikainen 2003)
- Australian fast-food consumption is predicted by higher household incomes, lesser allocation for time on eating and more time spent on home entertainment (Mohr et al. 2007)
- THUS, culture plays a role alongside economic considerations

Cultural Factors?

NATIONAL POPULATIONS

- 'A culture of convenience' among feasting/grazing nations (Ulijaszek 2007)
- Food associated with health versus pleasure (Rozin 1999)

SUB-NATIONAL POPULATIONS

- Social contagion of an idea that large bodies are acceptable (Christakis 2007)
- Omnivorousness or culinary adventurousness (Dixon et al. under prep)
- Nutritional confusion (Fischler 1993; Scrinis 2005; Dixon 2007)

2 cultural drivers of obesity risk

3. Culinary culture experimentation

4. Nutritional cacophony

3. Culinary culture adventurousness

In context of healthy food availability, what
drives fast & convenience food
acceptability?

Cultural omnivorousness

- “ a measure of the breadth of taste and cultural consumption” (Petersen 2005)
- “ability to move at will between cultural realms, a freedom to choose where one is positioned in the cultural landscape” (Emmison 2003, p.211)
- the more egalitarian spread of cultural consumption operates alongside the ‘covert operation’ of class-based discriminations
- upper SES can afford to be more culturally rigid than lower SES (Elchardus 1994)

Differential embrace of omnivorous diets

- All humans are omnivores, BUT as earlier slide shows nations with mono-culinary cultures are less obese
- The young embrace new diets more readily than the old (rising obesity in young French and Italian populations) (IOTF 2005)
- Under 45 Australians embrace fast food more than older cohorts (Mohr et al 2007)
- The cultural and symbolic overvaluation of food declines among subsequent generations (Ulijazsek 2007)

Age, education & period

- Are the factors repeatedly associated with cultural omnivorousness
- Older cohorts more omn in relation to the arts and leisure (Emmison); older cohorts more omn in relation to food (TCS study) but younger cohorts more omn in relation to food (WoM study)
- 'Elite (highly educated) omnivores' select according to authentic and exotic experiences; 'common omnivores' select according to what is new-onto-the-market (period)



Age, period and cohort effects on rise of Australian BMI prevalence

Prevalence of overweight increases with age, recency
of period and cohorts born since 1960 (Allman-Farinelli
et al. 2007)

4. Nutritional cacophony

Multiple & conflicting sources of advice

- Multiplication of food authorities & advice spawns confusion and anxiety (Fischler 1993; Scrinis 2005; Dixon 2007)
- Lack of agreement among experts (Banwell et al 2005)
- Social class inequities in parental lay knowledge (Coveney 2004)
- Absent household nutritional gatekeepers:
 - Numbers of women in full-time workforce (relatively low in France, Italy and Japan), with implications for
 - Home prepared meals: ritualised/less experimentation; eating at table, hence social regulation/inhibited eating; slower pace of eating and inhibited eating, smaller servings (Rozin et al 2005; Rozin et al 2003)

The taste trajectory applied to nutrition advice

“...the time lag between innovation and diffusion of new styles of eating or new flavours is now so rapid between haute and mass markets that style leadership is only possible in terms of how something is consumed rather than through the product itself” (Wright et al. 2001, p. 354)

Can/should governments intervene in the cultural economy of convenience?

The elephant in the room

Obesity as a by-product of Australia's cultural economy

- **Market failure:** produce an excess of cheap, energy-dense foods & barrage consumers with energy-dense food & drink as entertainment
- **Government failure:** emphasis on food safety & de-emphasis on nutrition & food education
- **Consumer failure:** accept short-termism of choice & value price over other qualities (Lang and Rayner 2007)
- **Societal failure:** trading off family/personal care life for unsociable working hours, long working hours & higher pay

Protecting the population against obesity

1. Base the food supply on accessible, affordable & **acceptable** 'nutrient-dense' calories
2. Promote diets based on frugality and dietary diversity (emphasising protein-fruit/veg-complex carbohydrate combinations)
3. Promote diets based on health-promoting ritualistic and social conventions
4. Promote home cooking from food literate family members