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# Centre for Metabolic Fitness

Optimising Health • Reducing Obesity • Modifying Lifestyles

## ***MEDIA RELEASE***

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### **New national diet and lifestyle research centre opens for business**

A national centre supported by five of Australia's most innovative universities and dedicated to researching the impact of diet and lifestyle on obesity, heart and general health will be launched in South Australia on July 7 2005.

The Australian Technology Network (ATN) Centre for Metabolic Fitness, headquartered at the University of South Australia, comprises more than 30 specialist researchers and their teams with expertise in nutrition, exercise physiology, psychology, epidemiology, and health economics from the Curtin, Queensland and Sydney Universities of Technology, UniSA and RMIT University.

The Centre will be launched by Vice Chancellor of the University of South Australia and Chair of the ATN, Professor Denise Bradley, at 1.45 pm at UniSA's City East Campus in the Mutual Community Lecture Theatre, Basil Hetzel Building.

Visiting President of the American Heart Association, Professor Robert Eckel, will deliver the keynote address emphasizing the vital role of research into the relationship between diet and exercise and quality of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Head of one of the world's most powerful health lobby groups, Professor Eckel says our increasing understanding of the relationship between food, fitness and heart health is providing new opportunities for people to take control of their long term well being.

Coronary heart disease is the number one killer in the US and in Australia, where more than one third of all deaths relate to heart, stroke and vascular diseases.

"The foundation of important research facilities such as the ATN Centre for Metabolic Fitness will help to provide a much broader picture of the complex relationships between the body and the mind which influence the development of heart and vascular diseases and other conditions such as diabetes," Professor Eckel said.

"It brings together researchers who should be working together – experts in diet and nutrition, experts in human biology and exercise physiology, researchers who understand human behaviour and those who know about the cost of health care. These researchers will explore the factors that influence health and well being and ensure the results of that work are accessible to the wider public so that they can make informed lifestyle choices."

Director of the ATN Centre for Metabolic fitness, Professor Peter Howe says about 90 per cent of Australian adults have a least one modifiable risk factor for heart stroke and vascular diseases.

"Sometimes small changes can make a very big impact in people's lives," Professor Howe said.

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“The Centre will evaluate the potential of specific diet and exercise combinations to deliver greater benefits and will include large community based demonstration trials as part of that work. We need to ensure that recommendations are cost-effective and sustainable.

“We will explore and scientifically test specific claims about the health benefits of new food supplements and functional foods’ such as Omega-3 enriched products.”

Professor Howe said the Centre would also be examining behavioural aspects of health and fitness.

“We need to look from both directions. On the one hand, we will examine how certain nutrients and exercise programs can enhance mood and cognitive function. At the same time, we will be looking at strategies that can motivate people to change their lifestyle. We can have all the hard facts about diet and exercise but if we are unable to get people to make changes, we are fighting a losing battle.”

It is this comprehensive approach, working with industry and the community and working across research disciplines and institutions that Professor Howe says is so unique.

“This is an ambitious project but one which, if successful, will deliver long term national health benefits.”

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