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Unhealthy Eating Habits in the Marshall Islands Result from Deteriorating Reef Systems

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ABSTRACT

Small Island nations such as the Marshall Islands (RMI) have limited resources. In order to provide food to its population of about 60,000, the Marshallese have had to replace traditional food with foreign imports. A result of this is the prevalence of obesity and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The most common NCD is diabetes. Diabetic patients are encouraged to follow strict diets that include mostly traditional, local food such as fish; however, because of environmental factors, fish populations are threatened.

The objective of this study was to understand the relationship between healthy reefs, healthy fish populations and the health of communities as a result of high fish consumption and the consumption of imported canned goods. Our methods included consumption surveys from a 2010 report (Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority – Coastal Fisheries Division), interviews acquired from 10 households per village, information on health and population (RMI Census & RMI Annual Health Report), and data collection from bio sampling done on outer island reef fish. Our preliminary results indicate that families who consume more fish are less likely to have a diabetic member. In conclusion, individuals who consume fish as their main source of protein are overall healthier and less susceptible to diseases like diabetes.

Key Words: Diabetes, Traditional Food, Reef Health, Canned Goods

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