

Interview with Richard Mattes, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor of Nutrition Science at Purdue University, Adjunct Associate Professor of Medicine at the Indiana University School of Medicine, Affiliated Scientist at the Monell Chemical Senses Center, and Vice-President Elect for the American Society for Nutrition.

Dr. Mattes received his Ph.D. in Human Nutrition from Cornell University and conducted post-doctoral studies at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center and the Monell Chemical Senses Center. He remained at Monell for 13 years progressing to full member. At Purdue University, Dr. Mattes is the Director of the Ingestive Behavior Research Center, and the Director of Purdue's Public Health Graduate Program. He also holds numerous external responsibilities including Associate Editor for *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. He is also secretary of the Rose Marie Pangborn Sensory Science Scholarship Fund. Richard Mattes has been the principal investigator on National Institutes of Health grants continuously since 1984, and has authored of over 265 publications.



1. How did you first get involved in nutritional biochemistry and research? What made you interested in the field of nutrition science?

My original plan was to pursue a career in public health. I selected nutrition as a focus because while diet-related disorders were widespread, a large proportion appeared solvable. It was a field where one could make a difference. Following completion of my public health training, I realized I needed a deeper understanding of nutrition science to be in a position to address the issues that now seemed much more complicated. My pivot to nutrition and sensory science stemmed from my work under Shiriki Kumanyika who was interested in sodium intake and hypertension at the time as well as a recommendation by a friend to attend an illuminating course taught by Bruce Halpern, a sensory scientist in the Psychology Department at Cornell. Understanding the drivers of food choice, such as sensory function, seemed to be a critical control point for moderating diet-related chronic diseases.

2. When and why did you first join ASN? What convinced you to join the organization?

I joined the American Institute of Nutrition (AIN) in 1986, immediately following completion of my post-doctoral training, when I thought I had completed a sufficient body of work to be eligible for membership. I considered it an honor to be a member of a professional association that included many of the scientists publishing work that guided my thinking. It was also an important resource for me since I was at an institution with a mission to understand the mechanisms and functions of the chemical senses, not address nutrition problems. So, while I had wonderful colleagues, few had similar training to me or similar interests and as a young scientist, I needed more feedback from people knowledgeable in nutrition. The AIN was an invaluable resource.

3. What aspects of ASN membership have you found most useful, professionally? What other aspects of your membership do you find useful as your career has progressed?

Membership benefits like access to all four ASN Journals have been, and continue to be the primary means for my keeping current with the advancing science.

4. What aspects of your research do you foresee being most important for ASN members?

My research has always been at the interface between nutrition, sensory, food and psychological sciences. I hope that it serves as a bridge to these other areas as they are integral to understanding food choice and how behavior influences physiology.

5. Can you tell us more about your current position and the research activities in which you are involved?

I currently have a split appointment. Sixty percent of my effort is devoted to building and administering a new public health graduate program. So, after over thirty years of basic and clinical research, I find myself back at my original professional aspiration. The other forty percent of my effort is as a traditional faculty member, though I do direct the Ingestive Behavior Research Center which provides a unique opportunity to train doctoral students in this area of specialization.

6. What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing nutrition researchers today? Are there any areas where you would like to see more research?

My biggest concern stems from the decreasing funding base for nutrition research. Of course, it directly limits what science can be pursued, but more insidiously, I think it drives scientists to take more advocacy roles for their area of work and this corrodes the scientific process. It also requires more time and energy being spent writing grants with the consequence being less time to engage in professional activities (e.g., reviewing manuscripts, serving on professional committees) which further hampers progress.

7. Is there anything else you'd like to tell students and postdocs within ASN?

Invoke the word “no” as seldom as possible. Many will argue the best advice is to maintain a laser focus on one’s area of study. Not having tried this approach I can’t speak to its success. My experience is that every opportunity I’ve pursued in some way, at some time, has proven to be worthwhile.

Dr. Mattes’ research focuses on the areas of hunger and satiety, regulation of food intake in humans, food preferences, human cephalic phase responses and the mechanisms and functions of taste, with the objective of understanding the neural, genetic, metabolic, hormonal, cognitive, cultural and especially sensory influences on human ingestive behavior, nutrient utilization and energy balance in healthy and clinical populations.