

## Switch to the International System of Units

A coherent system of metric units, officially titled the International System of Units or SI units, has been developed and implemented over the last 20 years. The American National Metric Council has advocated that all scientific-medical journals shift to SI units, and many journals have done so. As of our January 1991 issue, the *Journal of Nutritional Biochemistry* will implement the usage of SI units.

The SI dictates certain conventions for symbols, naming, structure, and style used in reporting data. The major benefits of this system are that data are more easily comparable and that confusion associated with varying methods for reporting data among international contributors will be eliminated. Biological reactions occur between molecules, and therefore it is much more useful to think in terms of moles of reactants rather than grams of reactants. In Europe, commas are often used for decimal points, while in the USA commas are used to separate long numbers into segments of three. All of us still use individuals' names for certain units of enzyme activity, and sometimes confusion arises as to the definition of an International Unit of enzyme activity. The SI system helps to standardize notation and thereby minimizes confusion.

The reporting of data in SI units is common practice in many parts of the world. In the United States this system has not been common practice, and therefore we are reprinting a reference document prepared by Donald Young (chairman of the American National Metric Council). The Council has agreed not to copyright the document and to allow its publication without permission if the approved version is not revised for publication. Additional information about the SI system can be obtained from:

Lowe, D.A. (1975) *A Guide to International Recommendations on Names and Symbols for Quantities and on Units of Measurement*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

The justifications for the use of SI units are presented in detail in Dr. Young's article. For the *Journal of Nutritional Biochemistry*, the main justification is facilitating the exchange of scientific information by our internationally based readership.

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