Author’s response to reviews

Title: Modern dietary pattern is prospectively associated with earlier age at menarche: data from the CHNS 1997-2015

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RESPONSE TO NUTRITION JOURNAL COMMENTS

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Point-to-point reply

EXPLANATION TO ALL REVIEWERS
We appreciate the suggestions made by the editors and reviewers since we believe that they helped to improve our manuscript. We addressed each of the points raised by the reviewers and changed the text accordingly. All the changes are highlighted in yellow.

Associate Editor Comments: One of the reviewers points out that the analytical issue that she raised in the first review and in this round really needs to be addressed, at the very least with some
sensitivity analysis. She is afraid that excluding participants on the basis of the outcome itself is potentially leading to severe selection bias. I urge the authors to address this point.

We thank the associate editor for pointing out this issue. We have carefully considered Reviewer #1’s comments and re-conducted data analysis according to her suggestions. The manuscript has been revised correspondingly. Please see response to Comment #1 of Reviewer #1.

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Reviewer #1:
Thank you for responding to the comments. I just have two remaining points.

Comment #1) I still do not think that the analysis was handled correctly. I understand now that not all of the participants were followed every year, but this does not provide justification for why the girls who had not yet started menarche were left out of the analysis. You should include all of the girls who had baseline dietary information and who had at least one follow-up visit thereafter, using Cox regression models. If they did not experience menarche at that follow-up visit, then they should be censored at their follow-up visit date. By excluding all the girls who were followed up but who had not yet started menarche, you are running the risk of severely biasing the results. For example, there may be 13 or 14 year-olds who have not yet started menarche, and this delay in menarche could be caused by a dietary factor. By excluding these girls, you miss out on potentially valuable information (but the Cox regression will appropriately account for this). One way to restrict the age range to a more plausible menarcheal range would be to exclude girls who were