

Healthy eating guidelines: Can it be more palatable and convenient for consumers?

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Approximately 200 different food decisions are made in any one day verifying that eating, drinking and food choices are among the most frequent of daily human behaviours⁽¹⁾. In order to understand or try to influence food choice decisions and behaviours, the attitudes and motivations underpinning this behaviour must be explored and understood^(2,3). Although dietary guidelines are evidence based, targeted and culturally appropriate; they fail to account for the impact of differing attitudes and motivations on food choice behaviour.

The aim of this research is to determine the impact of food choice attitudes and motivations on dietary behaviour and to demonstrate how this evidence can be used to enhance the targeting of dietary guidelines for health eating.

The National Adult Nutrition Survey collected data on the food and beverage consumption of 1500 Irish adults and alongside anthropometric measurements, socio-demographic and lifestyle data, physical activity. Food choice attitudes and motivations were measured by a questionnaire using a range previously validated constructs.

Analysis of the food choice motives showed that taste was the most important food choice motive for consumers followed by health and nutrition. As shown in the Table, those who rank taste and other motivations such as cost and convenient high have different dietary intakes compared to those who rank health and nutrition higher. Energy and percentage energy from fat is higher, and fruit and vegetable consumption is lower for those who rank taste as their primary motivation in food choice. A lower BMI and high fruit and veg intake was associated with higher nutrition ranking and lower cost ranking. Health as a primary motivation was associated with a lower BMI and higher fruit and vegetable consumption. Convenience motivation was associated with lower fruit and vegetable intakes.

Motive	Ranking	%	EI kcal d-1		% EI Fat		BMI kg m-2		Fruit & veg g d-1	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Taste	1st/2nd	54	2104 ^a	659	35 ^a	5.9	26.8	4.7	250 ^a	176
	≥3rd	46	1974 ^b	645	34 ^b	6.4	27	4.9	284 ^b	193
Health	1st/2nd	42	2024	634	34 ^a	6.2	26.6	4.5	311 ^a	192
	≥3rd	58	2058	671	35 ^b	6.1	27.1	5.1	233 ^b	172
Nutrition	1st/2nd	42	2017	633	34	5.9	26.4 ^a	4.4	312 ^a	184
	≥3rd	58	2063	672	35	6.3	27.2 ^b	5.1	232 ^b	178
Cost	1st/2nd	18	2052	737	35	6.5	28.1 ^a	5.6	202 ^a	158
	≥3rd	82	2043	638	34	6.1	26.6 ^b	4.7	280 ^b	187
Convenience	1st/2nd	20	2059	663	35	5.9	27.4	5.3	210 ^a	165
	≥3rd	80	2040	653	34	6.2	26.7	4.7	279 ^b	187

Values are means across low vs high rankings of motives. Significance determined using t-test. ^{ns} non significant; ^{ab} significant difference between 1st/2nd and 3rd ranking of motive at P < 0.05. EI = Energy Intake; BMI = body mass index.

Hence dietary guidelines that are promoted on the basis of healthy eating alone will only appeal to a certain proportion of the population who are motivated by health and nutrition. Guidelines should account for taste and cost drivers of food choice and promote the sensory aspects of healthy food choice and not solely health.

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