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Views from healthcare and food professionals on which proteins to include within the Eatwell Guide to support diversification

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Shifting towards predominantly plant-based diets is an important tool in addressing population and planetary health, and diversifying protein intakes is part of this.[1] Whilst updating the Eatwell Guide to include a diverse range of protein sources can encourage individuals to adopt more varied and sustainable dietary patterns, understanding healthcare and food professionals' perspectives on which protein sources to include in dietary guidelines is essential for effective recommendations, which this research aimed to explore.

Between 8-31 March 2024, an incentivised survey was distributed to members of the MyNutriWeb community, made up primarily of healthcare and food professionals. A part of the survey aimed to gain insights about which protein sources respondents recommend when supporting people with their protein consumption, and which should be included if the visual representation of the Eatwell Guide was to be updated.

Of the 865 respondents, the majority (65%) were dietitians and nutritionists, with 12% being students and the remaining respondents representing various other healthcare and food professions. When supporting people with their protein consumption, 92% (of 748 respondents) regularly recommend legumes and pulses, 87% fish, 85% eggs, 72% poultry, 57% soy/tempeh/tofu, 47% unprocessed red meat (e.g. beef, pork, lamb), 34% mycoprotein (e.g. fungi meat alternatives like Quorn) and 2% processed meat (e.g. sausages, bacon, ham, salami, pies, burgers, pâtés, canned meat). When asked which protein sources should be included if the Eatwell Guide protein description was to be updated, 90% (of 643 respondents) selected soy/tempeh/tofu, 88% legumes and pulses, 79% eggs, 78% mycoprotein, 78% fish, 74% poultry, 63% unprocessed red meat and 6% processed meat. 10% also selected 'other' and 25 of the 64 additional comments provided mentioned nuts and seeds. In relation to the brief protein description included on the Eatwell Guide visual, 53% (of 635 respondents) responded yes to an update supporting people to consider more fungi and plant-based proteins within their diet, and only 6% responded no. The remaining 41% responded that it depends or other, and the most prominent additional comment was on the need to keep fish, eggs and meat in the description.

This survey reveals a consensus among healthcare and food professionals regarding the importance of including a variety of protein sources in dietary guidelines. Legumes, pulses, fish, and eggs were among the most recommended protein sources, emphasizing the significance of both non-animal and animal-based proteins in a balanced diet. While there was strong support for including more non-animal protein foods such as soy, legumes, and mycoprotein in the Eatwell Guide, respondents also emphasized the importance of retaining animal protein sources. This suggests that a balanced approach, incorporating non-animal (plant and fungi) and animal-based proteins, is widely supported among professionals for promoting healthier and more sustainable eating habits.

References

1. Willett W, Rockstrom J, Jonell M *et al.* (2019) Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT-Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems *Lancet* **393**(10170), 447–492. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736%2818%2931788-4.