

Consumer Trends: Fruit & Veggie Consumption Increases Wellbeing

LONDON (Leatherhead Food Research) — The University College London (UCL) published findings from a UK-based study looking at the impact of a range of health and lifestyle factors on wellbeing — one of the factors was fruit and vegetable consumption. The study, based on more than 65,000 randomly selected adults who were participating in the Health Survey for England, reports that the higher a person's intake of fruit and vegetables, the lower their risk of death from diseases such as cardiovascular disease and cancer. People in the study who ate seven or more portions a day had a 33% reduced risk of death from these diseases compared with people who ate less than one portion.

One criticism levelled at UCL's study by food and drink manufacturers and associations, such as the British Frozen Food Federation (BFFF), is that the study only considers the benefits of fresh fruit and vegetables, while dismissing the nutritional benefits of processed foods, in particular frozen foods. The Director General of the BFFF has recently been quoted in *The Grocer* emphasising that "research has shown that frozen fruit and vegetables can have equivalent levels of vitamins and nutrients compared to fresh."

A recent poll with 1,185 UK consumers by Leatherhead Food Research has shown how difficult it is for consumers to achieve the Department for Health's recommended five fruit and vegetables a day, let alone the seven quoted in UCL's study. Leatherhead's poll shows that on average UK consumers report they eat 4.3 portions of fruit and vegetables a day. When asked whether they would be able to eat seven a day, nearly half admitted it would be difficult. A fifth of consumers said the price tag for fruit and vegetables prevented them from eating more and over one in ten were put off by the amount of planning and preparation required to fit fresh fruit and vegetables into their diet. 50%, however, said nothing prevented them from eating more fruit and vegetables, suggesting they believe their fruit and vegetable intake is adequate.

Emma Gubisch, Strategic Insight Manager at Leatherhead, said "many consumers believe they are actually eating enough fruit and vegetables and can't imagine how they would incorporate more into their diet. The 'five a day' message has been picked up by consumers as a benchmark — if they believe they are managing to eat roughly five portions a day, then they think they are doing a good job. 'Seven a day' would require a shift in consumer mind-set and behaviour."

Leatherhead Food Research believes food and drink companies are in a strong position to help consumers to incorporate more fruit and vegetables into their diet. Through membership enquiries and confidential projects, Leatherhead is working with manufactures and retailers to respond to this call for more fruit and vegetables by revisiting recipes, testing the sensory profiles and nutritional properties of

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products and advising on what claims can be made on pack.

With the focus moving towards more regulation, manufacturers will need to be armed with as much information about the nutritional and sensory profile of their product as possible if they want to make a 'five a day' or even 'seven a day' claim. Georgia Taylor, Leatherhead's Marketing & Claims Advisor, said those responsible for claims on-pack and in advertising and marketing material should ensure that the product meets the criteria for being a portion of fresh fruit or vegetables in order to claim that a product counts as one of a person's 'five a day.'

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