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Shocking new stats on veg consumption in Britain

Most of us don't eat our five a day, but new research from the Food Foundation reveals how bad the situation is when you take a closer look at our veg consumption (1).

A quarter of secondary school age children eat less than one portion of veg a day. New government guidance indicates we should be eating about 7 portions of fruit and veg a day. Assuming half of these are veg, only 1:20 teens eat more than 3.5 portions a day. More than a third of the veg they do eat is highly processed which means that pizza and beans now contribute 17% of their veg intake.

Veg provides fibre and Food Foundation research shows that 92% of typical teenagers don't eat enough fibre. Veg also helps prevent a range of diet-related disease that is currently placing unprecedented demand on our NHS. 20,000 premature deaths could be prevented in the UK if we tackled low veg consumption. And veg provides important vitamins and minerals that are especially important for teen girls who are not far off becoming mums themselves. Significant proportions of teenage girls have very low intakes of iron, magnesium, potassium, zinc and vitamin A.

Anna Taylor, Executive Director of the Food Foundation said *"Our research shows our veg consumption is in decline and is no better than it was in the 1970s in spite of the 5 A Day campaign. It also shows our food system makes it too hard for us to eat enough veg."*

"There are not enough veg snacks which can compete with confectionery and crisps, cheap fast food is largely devoid of veg, and only 1.2% of food advertising spend goes on veg. While 5-7 year olds now generally get a healthy school lunch which has to include some veg, after the age of 7 uptake of school meals drops".

And the situation could be about to get worse. We now rely on imports for 42% of the veg we eat (up from 17% 30 years ago) and along with other imported foods, prices are expected to start rising due to the drop in the value of sterling. Between 2007 and 2014 veg prices went up by 11% and people bought 5% less veg. Those on a low income cut back more (2).

Laura Sandys, former MP and Chair of the Food Foundation said *"Our food system makes it too hard for us to eat enough veg. 5 A Day is a great consumer awareness campaign but it has had no impact on our consumption of veg, which has gone down in recent years. Veg needs a major facelift with the best brains in advertising needed to make it a super desirable treat."*

Lee Abbey, Horticulture adviser at the NFU said *"Despite numerous government and industry initiatives to improve consumer diets, fruit and veg consumption simply hasn't risen. Much*

more has to be done to make fruit and veg available whenever and wherever we buy our food and in the right format to satisfy today's shopping habits. We need to build a supply chain that is fit for the future and works collaboratively from the supplier right through to the retailer. Consumers want to eat more fruit and veg and everyone in the food supply chain has a responsibility to enable them to do so."

Prof Corinna Hawkes, Director, Centre for Food Policy, City, University of London said *"Horticulture is something the UK can excel in. We can produce tasty fruit and vegetables that people want to eat, picked and packed by an engaged and well-treated workforce, while contributing to a healthy agricultural economy and natural environment. With these multiple wins, Brexit offers a golden opportunity for a race to the top to make Britain known for the quality of our produce. To do so, government needs a coherent plan to allow a diversity of supply chains to flourish to create a vibrant horticultural economy."*

On November 7th, the Food Foundation, Nourish Scotland and WWF launch a new initiative to tackle the supply chain barriers to veg consumption working with retailers, producers, manufacturers and fast food chains to make it easier for everyone to eat veg, leading to a major summit on June 7 next year (3).

Notes to Editor

- (1) The full story can be found in Veg Facts, due to be published by the Food Foundation on November 7th, 2016.
- (2) [DEFRA, 2015, Family Food 2014. DEFRA](#)
- (3) For more information about the project launch see www.foodfoundation.org.uk/PeasPlease

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