

Minority groups pick up worst European eating habits

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Immigrant populations in Europe face an increased risk of diet-related diseases as they adjust to a 'Western' lifestyle, according to scientists at the University of Leeds.

A recent study shows that the [dietary habits](#) of immigrants change when they move to European countries. According to the research, immigrant populations replace the healthy components of their native diet with the worst aspects of western diets, such as processed and fast foods.

The risks are greater among younger generations of the immigrant groups, as they are more likely than their elders to eat less healthy foods found in their new country.

Dr Santosh Khokhar at the University of Leeds' School of [Food](#) Science and Nutrition examined changes to the diets of African-Caribbeans, Chinese, Mexicans, Moroccans, Surinamese, South Asians and Turks living in Europe.

They found ethnic groups with low incomes had the most restricted food choice, as the foods of their traditional diet had to be imported, so becoming more expensive. In comparison, the availability of the unhealthiest western food was very high and also low cost.

Dr Khokhar, Senior Lecturer in Food Biochemistry, said that elements of the traditional diets are being 'replaced' with less healthy alternatives'. She continued: "The inclusion of snack foods such as [French fries](#), chips

and cakes leads to ethnic populations having higher levels of fat, salt and sugar in their diet."

She added that groups in lower socioeconomic communities "often eat poorer quality foods, such as cheaper cuts of meat with more fat. They also tend to buy less fruits and vegetables and they consume more processed foods".

In the study *Changing dietary habits of ethnic groups in Europe and implications for health*, published in *Nutrition Reviews*, she proposed that the decline in the nutritional quality of the diet leads to ethnic groups becoming "more susceptible to diet-related health problems similar to those affecting the mainstream population in Europe, such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes".

"The ethnic group that integrated most strongly with their host country rapidly adopted the disease patterns of the host," she said.

The study found that diets are affected by a variety of factors including income, a lack of nutritional knowledge, availability of certain foods and the religious customs of the ethnic group. Generation and age are also major factors; younger generations have a less traditional diet compared to their elders, who tend to be "more segregated from the mainstream population and thus continue eating traditional foods."

In related research published in the journal *Food Chemistry*, Dr Khokhar emphasised that to fully understand the impact of diet on health more information is needed on the composition of individual foods and of the diet as a whole. It is particularly important to produce data using agreed ['harmonised'] procedures so that comparisons can be made between countries and between populations.

[More information:](#)

P A Gilbert and S Khokhar, Changing dietary habits of [ethnic groups](#) in Europe and implications for health, *Nutrition Reviews*, 2008, 66 (4).

S Khokhar et al., Harmonised procedures for producing new data on the nutritional composition of ethnic foods, *Food Chemistry*, 2009, 113, 816-24.

Source: University of Leeds ([news](#) : [web](#))

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