

Longer life for those who follow nutritional guidelines

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Those who follow the nutritional guidelines issued by Sweden's National Food Agency live longer. This is shown by a new study of the diets of 17 000 Swedish men and women over a long period of time. The greatest effect was observed in men, whose risk of dying of cardiovascular disease was almost halved.

The researchers behind the results, which were recently published in the journal *Public Health Nutrition*, are Isabel Drake and Elisabet Wirfält from Lund University, [Sweden](#).

Eating a varied diet with a high intake of wholegrain foods, fruit and vegetables, fish and seafood and polyunsaturated fats has long been regarded as healthy by scientific experts. However, as interest in our eating habits increases, many nutritional recommendations have been called into question, including the nutritional guidelines from the National Food Agency, which build on these principles.

Drake and Wirfält have shown, however, that there is a clear link between the nutritional guidelines from the National Food Agency and a lower risk of dying among middle-aged [men](#) and women. One of the most important conclusions is that the problem is not the nutritional guidelines, but rather our poor ability to follow them:

"Surprisingly few - fewer than three per cent - of the participants in the study followed the nutritional recommendations fully. Above all, people ate too much sugar, saturated fat and refined cereal products, for

example white bread", says Isabel Drake.

In order to obtain the most comprehensive picture possible, the participants' complete food patterns were studied, and not only parts of their diet as in many other studies.

On average, the individuals' diets were monitored for 14 years. The men who were best at following the nutritional guidelines had a 21 per cent lower mortality rate. Looking specifically at cardiovascular disease, mortality was 41 per cent lower and from cancer-related diseases the figure was 18 per cent. Among women, the overall difference in mortality rate was 14 per cent. For [cardiovascular disease](#) and cancer, however, it was not possible to establish a link with women's diets.

"Women generally ate a healthier diet than men, for example with more fruit and vegetables, and it can therefore be more difficult to identify health benefits for women. There are also biological differences between the sexes that may possibly explain the difference", says Elisabet Wirfält.

The researchers analysed data from the Malmö [Diet](#) and Cancer study, with the aim of investigating whether those who followed the nutritional guidelines from the National Food Agency had a lower mortality rate. The data set comprised a total of 17 000 men and women aged 45-73 who had kept a food diary. The participants' diets were graded using a nutritional index that reflects how well they followed the nutritional guidelines.

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Provided by Cambridge University Press

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