

# Diabetes dilemma: Most Europeans unsure how to reduce type 2 diabetes risk, research finds

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Despite greater access to health information than ever before, new research illustrates many people remain confused about diet and lifestyle messages related to increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes. The research also revealed health awareness in relation to type 2 diabetes varies considerably across Europe and identified a significant gap between what Europeans know they should do to reduce their risk, and what they actually manage to achieve.

The 2015 research, conducted by the Institute for Scientific Information on Coffee (ISIC) surveyed over 2,800 European adults across the UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Netherlands and Finland to identify the myths and misconceptions regarding the role of diet and lifestyle factors in the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. It also explored [consumer awareness](#) of the potential health benefits of coffee.

## Key findings:

There is confusion about the role of diet in the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, with many believing that a high total carbohydrate intake causes diabetes, and more believing high sugar foods cause diabetes

- More than 80% of those in Denmark, Finland and Italy and 70% in the UK and the Netherlands believe that sugary foods are a risk factor. However, the latest report from the UK's Scientific

Advisory Committee on Nutrition<sup>1</sup> published in 2015 only confirmed an association between sugary drinks and risk of developing type 2 diabetes, but not sugar in foods.

- 70 - 80 % of respondents in Finland, Germany, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands believe that sugary drinks are associated with a risk of type 2 diabetes this falls to less than 70% UK adults, and less than 30% of 18-24 year olds in the UK.
- Of the 7 nations polled, more than half (58%) agreed they would reduce their saturated fat intake despite this not being a specific risk factor associated with the development of type 2 diabetes. Conversely, 10% of Finns would increase their intake.
- Of the 7 nations polled, 55% would reduce their sodium intake to lower their risk of developing type 2 diabetes, despite this not being a specific risk factor.

There's an awareness that being overweight is a main risk factor for type 2 diabetes, however many found BMI confusing

- When asked about risks associated with being overweight, 80% of those in Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and the UK, 90% of those in Denmark, and Germany and 95% of those in Finland and 100% of young adults in Spain understand that being overweight is a key risk factor.
- However, 64% of respondents in Denmark, Germany, Finland and The Netherlands, and 56 % of those from the UK saw a high BMI as a key risk factor.

The good news is that some dietary and lifestyle messages seem to be getting through

- 87% of people polled believe that being overweight can increase the risk of type 2 diabetes.
- Almost 60% of respondents across the 7 countries are aware that

physical inactivity can increase the risk.

But there's significant differences between what Europeans know they should do and what they do to lower their [risk factors](#) for Type 2 Diabetes

- When asked which of the following lifestyle factors they believe can increase the risk of type 2 diabetes 87% of those polled know that being overweight increase the risk of type 2 diabetes but only 60% would lose weight if diagnosed with type 2 diabetes.
- 72% of respondents believe that having an unhealthy diet increases the risk of type 2 diabetes, but only 57% of Brits would improve their diet if diagnosed with type 2 diabetes

The research also ranked the 7 European countries from the most to least informed about diet and [lifestyle factors](#) related to type 2 diabetes risk reduction. Finland came out top, followed by Italy, Denmark, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands respectively. The UK fared worst coming at the bottom of the table.

Prof. Edith Feskens, Chair Nutrition and Health over the Lifecourse, Division of Human Nutrition, Wageningen University, commented: "Currently 7 percent of the European population suffers from diabetes, which means we now have 60 million patients. A similar amount of people have prediabetes, and these numbers are expected to increase during the next decades. Lifestyle interventions focusing on healthy diet and physical activity are able to reduce diabetes risk, and these should be implemented widely."

A growing body of evidence indicates that drinking three to four cups of coffee per day is associated with an approximate 25% lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes, compared to consuming none to less than

two cups per day 3,4. Again, ISIC's research revealed a disparity in awareness across Europe. In line with the overall ranking Finland was best informed about the potential health benefits of coffee in relation to type 2 diabetes, followed by Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands Germany and Spain respectively. Again, the UK fared worst coming at the bottom of the table:

## **Key findings:**

Whilst Europeans enjoy drinking coffee, consuming over 725 million cups of coffee a day<sup>5</sup>, many are not familiar with the research behind the potential health effects of the coffee bean

Across the 7 countries polled, more than a quarter (28%) of respondents believe that coffee had no beneficial properties. 45-55 year olds were most clued up, with 30% agreeing coffee could benefit health, and Finnish adults came out top with 40% familiar the associations between coffee and health.

Consumer awareness of the associations between coffee consumption and type 2 diabetes varies considerably across Europe

- Across the 7 markets polled, 31% of respondents believed that consuming coffee in moderation plays no part in increasing or decreasing the risk of type 2 diabetes.
- 85% of respondents polled were not aware that a number of studies have shown that drinking coffee in moderation may reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.
- 8% of respondents polled across the 7 markets were more likely to increase their consumption of tea than [coffee](#) to actively lower their risk of getting type 2 [diabetes](#)

**More information:** References:

1. Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (2015) 'Report on Carbohydrates and Health' The Stationery Office, London.
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