

Microplastics in food—Many unanswered questions among scientists and the general public

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Although overall 75 percent of the population regard food as safe, more and more Germans are showing concern about microplastics in food. As the latest BfR Consumer Monitor—a regular population survey conducted by the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR)—shows, the topic is better known and more people are concerned about it than they were six months ago.

Where 45 percent were previously concerned about microplastics in [food](#), this number has now risen by 11 percentage points to more than half of all respondents. It is of particular interest to the BfR whether public perception differs from the scientific estimation. From previous studies, it cannot be calculated just how many [microplastic](#) particles [consumers](#) really do ingest through the consumption of fish, for example. Microplastics have been determined above all in the gastrointestinal tract of fish which are not usually eaten. "In order to assess the actual risk of microplastics in the food chain, we require more reliable data, " explains BfR President Professor Dr. Dr. Andreas Hensel. "The BfR is currently conducting studies on the uptake of microplastics via the intestines and their possible health effects".

<https://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/364/bfr-consumer-monitor-08-2018.pdf>

No matter whether it's antimicrobial resistance or microplastics—what [health risks](#) are consumers aware of and what are they concerned about?

As a representative consumer survey, every six months the BfR Consumer Monitor provides an insight into the question of how the German-speaking population perceives health risks. To do so, roughly 1,000 people living in private households in Germany who are at least 14 years old are interviewed per telephone on behalf of the BfR.

The respondents still perceive smoking, climate and environmental pollution as well as an unhealthy or wrong diet as the biggest health risks. When asked about selected topics, salmonella, genetically modified food, [antimicrobial resistance](#) and residues of plant protection products still top the awareness scale—followed by microplastics in food, aluminium in food packaging materials and carbon monoxide. Antimicrobial resistance and microplastics are the two topics here that most respondents are concerned about. Compared to the last survey, the population is much more worried about microplastics, with concern having risen by 11 percentage points. More than half also find salmonella to be worrisome. By way of comparison, carbon monoxide, which was asked about for the first time and unknown to the majority of respondents this year, is only of concern to a good third.

Toys are estimated to be just as safe as they were in the last survey, but the feeling of safety has dropped slightly where textiles and cosmetics are concerned. The majority of respondents continue to trust that state institutions in Germany protect consumer health.

The BfR Consumer Monitor is dedicated on the one hand to topics which receive a lot of attention in public while on the other, it analyses questions which have not so much been the focus of attention up to now but which are relevant nonetheless, such as *Campylobacter* and mould in foods or the new method of "genome editing" for the targeted modification of genetic make-up. As in the first survey in

Provided by BfR Federal Institute for Risk Assessment

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