

# Oh, really? Insects are unpopular choice for alternative food

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Despite years of TV exposure courtesy of *I'm a Celebrity...Get Me Out Of Here*, research shows that the British public are yet to acquire an appetite for edible insects.

The new study, published in the British Food Journal and carried out by Dr. Rosie Robison and Victoria Circus of Anglia Ruskin University, examined the public's perception of more sustainable alternative sources of protein.

Participants were asked whether they would personally eat [lab-grown meat](#), [edible insects](#) and plant-based substitutes as part of an everyday meal, and asked to select reasons to explain their choice. The academics, from Anglia Ruskin's Global Sustainability Institute, found that only 26 percent of people surveyed said they would consume edible insects.

The most favoured alternative to [meat](#) was plant-based substitutes, for example tofu, Quorn, or Linda McCartney products, with 91 percent of people saying they would consume them, while 41 percent of respondents said they would be willing to eat lab-grown meat.

The study is the first to look at the effect of "meat attachment," or the extent to which eating meat forms one's identity, in people's perceptions towards alternative, sustainable proteins. It found that 100 percent of those with a low attachment to meat (mainly vegans, vegetarians and pescatarians) would consume plant-based substitutes, as would 85 percent of regular meat eaters who were highly attached to meat.

However, only 16 percent of the low meat attachment group would eat lab-grown meat, compared to 59 percent of those who eat meat more regularly. And only 4 percent of the low meat attachment group would consume insects, along with a minority of regular meat eaters (40 percent).

Dr. Robison said: "Conventional meat production has a significant impact on the natural environment, including the emission of an estimated 18 percent of all man-made greenhouse gases, which contribute to climate change. Recent reports have stressed the

importance of finding alternative sources of protein in order to help tackle this.

"Although lab-grown meat is not currently commercially available, studies indicate that it could require 45 percent less energy and 99 percent less land, and emit 96 percent fewer greenhouse gas emissions, than producing meat from livestock.

"Similarly, edible insects, of which 96 different species are known to be consumed by humans globally, require less land and emit up to 99 percent less greenhouse gases than livestock such as cows.

"We hope the findings of our study will help start conversations about how best to promote alternative proteins as sustainable options to conventional meat, and also debunk some of the myths that exist, particularly around insect protein."

Victoria Circus, who undertook the research as part of her MSc in Sustainability, said: "The 'yuck factor' was a key reason for people's reluctance to try insects. People said they didn't want to eat wriggly maggots, when in reality insects are much more likely to be ground up in a flour and used in a cookie, for example. Understanding and starting to change perceptions is important and I'm a Celebrity's gruesome bushtucker trials may have a lot to answer for."

**More information:** Victoria Emma Circus et al. Exploring perceptions of sustainable proteins and meat attachment, *British Food Journal* (2018). [DOI: 10.1108/BFJ-01-2018-0025](https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-01-2018-0025)

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