

New CSIRO tool to combat Australia's junk food addiction

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Low-nutrient, high-calorie food continues to be the top choice for Australians, with new research from CSIRO, Australia's national science agency, showing that nearly four out of five people are overindulging in junk foods every day.

The new findings come from the recent analysis of the CSIRO Healthy Diet Score survey.

CSIRO research scientist Dr. Gilly Hendrie said new approaches were needed when it came to discretionary foods and Australians' diets.

"Discretionary or junk foods are the number one issue affecting Australian diets today, with [excessive consumption](#) resulting in poor nutrition, high rates of obesity and an even higher risk of lifestyle diseases," Dr. Hendrie said.

To help Australians improve their diets, CSIRO has launched a free, online tool to provide the community with a greater understanding of their discretionary [food](#) intake and where they can make improvements to their eating habits.

"Launching just in time for those who may have overindulged this Easter, the new Junk Food Analyser provides individuals with specific advice on which categories of discretionary foods they are consuming the most, with the [interactive tool](#) providing strategies and tips on where calories can be reduced, which is essential for weight loss," Dr. Hendrie said.

On average, Australian adults are eating about twice as much as what is recommended in the Australian Dietary Guidelines, with a whopping 5.1 servings of discretionary foods consumed each day, the equivalent to about 3000kJ, or 20 small solid chocolate Easter eggs daily.

The results also uncovered our top weaknesses, with alcohol taking out the top spot (21% of total discretionary food intake), followed by cakes and biscuits (19%), sugar sweetened beverages (12%) and savoury pies and pastries (9%).

"While these types of foods and drinks are often high in sugar, calories and fat, they do bring enjoyment, which means alternative methods must be explored in helping people enjoy their favourite treats in the context of a healthy [diet](#)," Dr. Hendrie said.

A range of strategies have been modelled in the Junk Food Analyser to help users reduce calories in an achievable way.

"While the elimination strategy is common in diet programs and can reduce calories the most, the interactive Junk Food Analyser lets users explore a combination of strategies to reduce discretionary food intake, without cutting their favourite foods altogether. That might include choosing to eliminate alcohol, take a break from cakes and biscuits and halve confectionery consumption," Dr. Hendrie said.

"The Junk Food Analyser really does help Australians have their cake and eat it too.

"With the additional support of a balanced and evidence-based framework such as the CSIRO Total Wellbeing Diet, Australians can feel assured that they are embarking on a health journey that fits into their lifestyle, without the sacrifice," she said.

To take the new Junk Food Analyser quiz, head to www.junkfoodanalyser.com

More information: Genevieve James-Martin et al. Strategies to Reduce Consumption of Unhealthy Foods and Beverages, *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jand.2020.12.003](#)

Provided by CSIRO

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