

Young people in Norway lack knowledge about healthy food, concludes study

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Young people in Norway lack knowledge about healthy food. This is revealed in [a recent study conducted at the University of Agder \(UiA\)](#), published in *Public Health Nutrition*.

"The young participants in our study generally demonstrate moderate literacy in matters of food and nutrition, as reflected in the moderate quality of their diet," says Synne Groufh-Jacobsen. She is a Ph.D. research fellow at UiA and a researcher at the Center for Lifecourse Nutrition, a priority research center at UiA.

In this study, Groufh-Jacobsen explored the knowledge and eating habits of [young people](#) with various plant-based diets, comparing them with a control group consuming all types of food.

As part of the research project, 165 participants aged 16–24 from Agder were categorized into five distinct diet types:

- Vegans—only plant-based foods
- Lacto-ovo vegetarians—predominantly plant-based, including varying amounts of dairy and eggs, but no meat or fish
- Pescatarians—mostly plant-based with some seafood, dairy, and eggs, but no meat
- Flexitarians—mostly plant-based with limited amounts of animal products (meat or [meat products](#) less than twice a week)
- Omnivores (control group)—all types of food without dietary restrictions

Knowledge gaps among the youth

Groufh-Jacobsen and her colleagues gathered information on the types of food participants had consumed in the last six months. To assess the diet quality, the foods were scored based on health authorities' dietary advice.

Government recommends eating a [varied diet](#) including fruits, vegetables, berries, whole grains, and fish, with moderate meat intake and limited salt and added sugar.

"Many participants lacked awareness about the healthiest food choices, struggled with interpreting food labels, and had difficulty understanding nutritional content," Groufh-Jacobsen says.

Many were unable to differentiate between two products or determine which one contained the highest energy content.

"They couldn't pinpoint the sources of sugar in the product. Several also did not understand the product labeling, such as the bread scale on different types of bread," explains the researcher.

The omnivores ([control group](#)) demonstrated the lowest quality of diet and the least knowledge about food.

Vegans and flexitarians scored the highest

Vegans in the study stood out compared to the young omnivores. The diet of [vegans](#) was more in line with health authority recommendations, especially in terms of vegetables, unsalted nuts and seeds, beans and legumes. They also reported consuming fewer sugary drinks compared to omnivores.

Flexitarians who eat plant-based foods with limited amounts of meat also stood out. They exhibited the highest knowledge about food and the second-best quality of diet, only surpassed by vegans.

Fresh insights into competence and skills

The study is among the first in the country to investigate both knowledge and skills related to food and nutrition among young people with plant-based diets. A main objective has been to find out if they can put together a diet that meets the body's needs.

"It's not just a matter of having adequate knowledge of food and nutrition to navigate today's food landscape, but also having sufficient skills to plan, choose, prepare, and eat foods that meet the body's needs for nourishment," says Groufh-Jacobsen.

Encourages more knowledge

She encourages young people in general and those excluding certain foods from their diet to acquire knowledge about food and nutrition.

"If you exclude several food groups from your [diet](#), it is especially important to have sufficient knowledge of how you can replace them with other foods with similar nutritional content," she says.

Engaged in ongoing research

The study on the eating habits of young people in Agder is part of Groufh-Jacobsen's doctoral work.

Through ongoing studies, she will take a closer look at what young people know about [food](#) by examining their actual dietary choices and nutrient intake.

"We have only just begun to dive into the wealth of data that has been collected," says Groufh-Jacobsen.

More information: Synne Groufh-Jacobsen et al, Food literacy and diet quality in young vegans, lacto-ovo vegetarians, pescatarians, flexitarians and omnivores, *Public Health Nutrition* (2023). [DOI: 10.1017/S1368980023002124](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980023002124)

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