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Understanding determinants of consumer acceptability for meat and meat substitutes (#5)

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Short Abstract

It is recognised that individual differences in consumer sensory perceptions of foods are important influences on food preferences and choices. More recently there has been an additional focus on dimensions of personality which have also been demonstrated to be important sources of variations in food choices. Of these, the traits of *food neophobia* (FN) and *disgust sensitivity* (DS) have been found to be particularly important influences on meat products and on the adoption of other non-animal protein sources such as insects in foods. This presentation will outline recent findings of the relationship between FN and DS and food choices, and consider the underlying processes that lead to food rejections. Our view of FN in particular has broadened in recent years, and is now considered important in all food preferences, and not just novel foods. High FN persists into adulthood in a substantial proportion of the population and is associated with reduced dietary variety, which is most evident in measures of the acceptability and intake of both protein and plant foods as well as in higher numbers of disliked foods overall. Both FN and DS can be shown to be associated with higher levels of arousal, which likely mediates negative responses to foods. In addition, recent research into genetic variations in taste sensitivity, together with other personality traits such as *empathic responsiveness*, have confirmed a role for these variations in the balance of plant and animal foods in the diet, and has helped our understanding of the impact of DS and vegetarianism (both moral and disgust-based) on food choices. For example, bitterness sensitivity is positively correlated with DS based on fear of pathogens, which in turn is also positively associated with meat consumption and lower vegetable preferences.

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