

Too much fat and sugar more deadly than smoking

Eggsellent health: Around 80 million Easter eggs are sold in the UK each year — more than one egg per person!

How much should we worry about food? For many, the Easter holidays mean too many chocolate eggs and epic roast dinners. But a new study warns that bad eating can seriously damage your health.

Sugary chocolate Easter eggs; buttery hot cross buns; rare roast lamb. Easter is almost here, and for many people, it is a holiday all about food.

But should we really be indulging so much? This week, *The Lancet* published one of the largest ever food **studies**. It found that poor diet is a bigger killer than **smoking**. Almost 11 million people die early due to health problems caused by the food they eat.

Around 10 million of those deaths involved **heart problems**. But the research found that the biggest problem is not eating too much junk food. Instead, it is about the healthy foods that people are *not* eating.

“Increase your whole grains, fruit, nuts, seeds and vegetable intake and reduce salt if you can,” advised Dr Christopher Murray, one of the study’s authors.

While no country has a perfect diet, some are clearly eating better than others. Mediterranean countries, like Spain, Israel and France, have some of the lowest diet-

related deaths in the world. They are known for eating lots of fruits, vegetables and healthy fats like olive oil.

China meanwhile — which is known for salty foods — has some of the highest numbers of diet-related deaths.

Food for thought

How much should we worry about the food we eat? The study confirms that our diet has a big impact on our health. According to Murray, we must all ask ourselves the question: “Am I going to die in my 50s from a heart attack? Or am I going to have some of the diet-related cancers in my 40s?”

Then again, you can worry too much about food. Obsessively counting calories can not only make you miserable — it can make you more stressed, which leads to its own health problems. Perhaps we should all learn to enjoy healthy food instead. After all, Mediterranean diets are not just healthy, they are famously delicious.

YOU DECIDE

1. When choosing what to eat, do you care how healthy the options are?

ACTIVITIES

1. Make a poster giving advice on a healthy diet for young people. Take on board the research discussed in this article.

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

“One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well.”

Virginia Woolf
What do you think?

Q & A

What do we know?

The scientists found that people eat just 12% of the recommended amount of nuts and seeds per day; 23% of recommended whole grain foods; and 186% of recommended salt.

What do we not know?

How to improve diets. After all, food is cultural — traditional Asian sauces are very high in salt. Meanwhile, Mediterranean countries eat a lot of oily fish because they are close to the sea.

WORD WATCH

Studies

The Global Burden of Disease Study was conducted by the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) in Seattle. It was published in *The Lancet* this week. IHME says it is the biggest look at the impact of diets on health ever conducted. It used data from 195 countries.

Smoking

This causes around eight million early deaths a year.

Heart problems

Too much salt increases the amount of sodium in your blood. This raises blood pressure, putting strain on your heart and arteries. This, in turn, raises the risk of heart attacks.