

Attitudes and beliefs towards meat substitute products among adult male omnivores in the republic of Ireland

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The growing worldwide population has led to an increase in food consumption and adequate changes to food systems are necessary to improve global sustainability⁽¹⁾. The EAT Lancet report highlights the need for a sustainable food system to protect the ecosystem and prevent premature adult deaths. A planetary diet is recommended including high consumption of fruit, vegetables, nuts, legumes, and reduced dairy and meat⁽²⁾. In Ireland meat is consumed by 98% of the adult population, and on average red meat intake is high and levels of processed meat exceed recommendations⁽³⁾. Meat substitutes provide a dietary alternative to aid in reducing meat consumption⁽⁴⁾. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the attitudes and knowledge towards meat substitute products among adult male omnivores in the Republic of Ireland. This qualitative study was conducted through online and in-person semi-structured interviews, with quantitative data collected through an online demographic and health questionnaire prior to interview commencement. Adult male omnivores living in the Republic of Ireland, were eligible to participate. Participants were asked four open-ended questions on their attitudes and knowledge of meat substitute products as part of a larger study. All interview data collected was recorded, transcribed, and analysed thematically⁽⁵⁾. Ethical approval was granted by the Department of Health and Nutritional Sciences Research Ethics Committee (REF: HPP2020102).

Thirteen males aged between 18–65 years old were interviewed. Four of the main themes identified are: sensory preferences towards meat substitutes, where a desire for sensory aspects of meat substitutes to replicate meat products was highlighted “once it tastes and looks the same then I’d probably be happy”; negative attitudes towards meat substitute consumption, presented a prevalence of reluctance “I don’t see the point”; barriers towards meat substitute consumption, highlighted issues regarding hesitancy and lack of education on products “if there was more information out there, I would certainly give them a chance yeah”; and positive attitudes towards meat substitutes, was prevalent as a minority of candidates were willing to consume such products “I’d have no problem, in trying it you know”. In conclusion, despite mixed experiences and attitudes towards meat substitute products there appears to be a hesitancy to incorporate them into regular diets. Providing opportunities to try a range of products and improving knowledge may encourage the transition to a healthier diet.

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