



Public Health  
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

# From Plate to Guide: What, why and how for the eatwell model

## Annexe 1: qualitative research phase 1

PHE externally commissioned two phases of qualitative research. This document provides the findings from the first phase.

# Eatwell plate design development research

Qualitative research findings (phase one): May 2015

Define research & insight

PHE externally commissioned two phases of qualitative research in conjunction with Define Research and Insight. This document provides the findings from the first phase of research.

Published November 2016

PHE publications gateway number: 2016451

## Phase one research objectives

Overall, the research needs to inform the development of the eatwell plate so that it best meets consumer needs (for accessibility and understanding) while delivering nutritional guidance in line with updated government policy.

### Understanding

How do consumers understand the current plate and alternative approaches in terms of content and messages?

### Design alternatives

To what extent do design alternatives affect:

- overall appeal
- accessibility and understanding
- perceived relevance to own diet

### Further directions

What else might be required to optimise the plate or support it to ensure that consumer take out is as intended?

## Phase one research approach and sample: overview

152 individual depth interviews across four nations, as follows:

Audience criteria/splits per nation		England	Scotland	Wales	NI
Lifestage	Young Independent	21	7	5	4
	Younger family only	20	6	5	5
	Younger family + older family	18	6	6	7
	Older Independent	19	5	7	5
	Older Family	2			2
Gender	Male	Min 25 (27)	Min 8 (10)	Min 8 (8)	Min 8 (9)
	Female	Min 45 (53)	Min 12 (14)	Min 12 (16)	Min 12 (16)
Internet accessibility	Internet-enabled	Min 60 (74)	Min 12 (22)	Min 12	Min 12 (22)
	Not internet-enabled	6	2	As falls out	2
SEG	BC1	29	Min 8 (10)	Min 8 (11)	Min 8, (10)
	C2DE	51	Min 12 (14)	Min 12 (13)	Min 12, (14)
<b>Total by nation (overall n = 152)</b>		<b>80</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>

**All fieldwork: 23 February to 30 March 2015**

# Overview findings

## **Overall, there was a high level of consistency across nations (and ethnicity) in terms of perceived accessibility and value**

**Across the whole sample, the plate (current and new designs) was recognised as having educational value to consumers and is generally seen as easy to use**

All understood the overall plate mechanic (current and new designs) relatively easily  
Irrespective of whether seen as a plate or plate-styled pie-chart, it was generally understood to describe the overall proportions of different food types and drinks that comprise a healthy diet.

For most respondents, the overall content (current and new designs) highlighted some discrepancies with their own current diets, which indicates that it fulfils its role in providing a point of comparison in an accessible/assessable way.

**However, the core plate content raises some questions about media/market-delivered information on healthy eating<sup>1</sup> being at odds with Government guidance. This is likely to need resolving in supporting information**

# There was also consistency in terms of requirements for overall content and approach of the new design

**No significant differences between nations or ethnicity in terms of:**

General themes on consumer needs

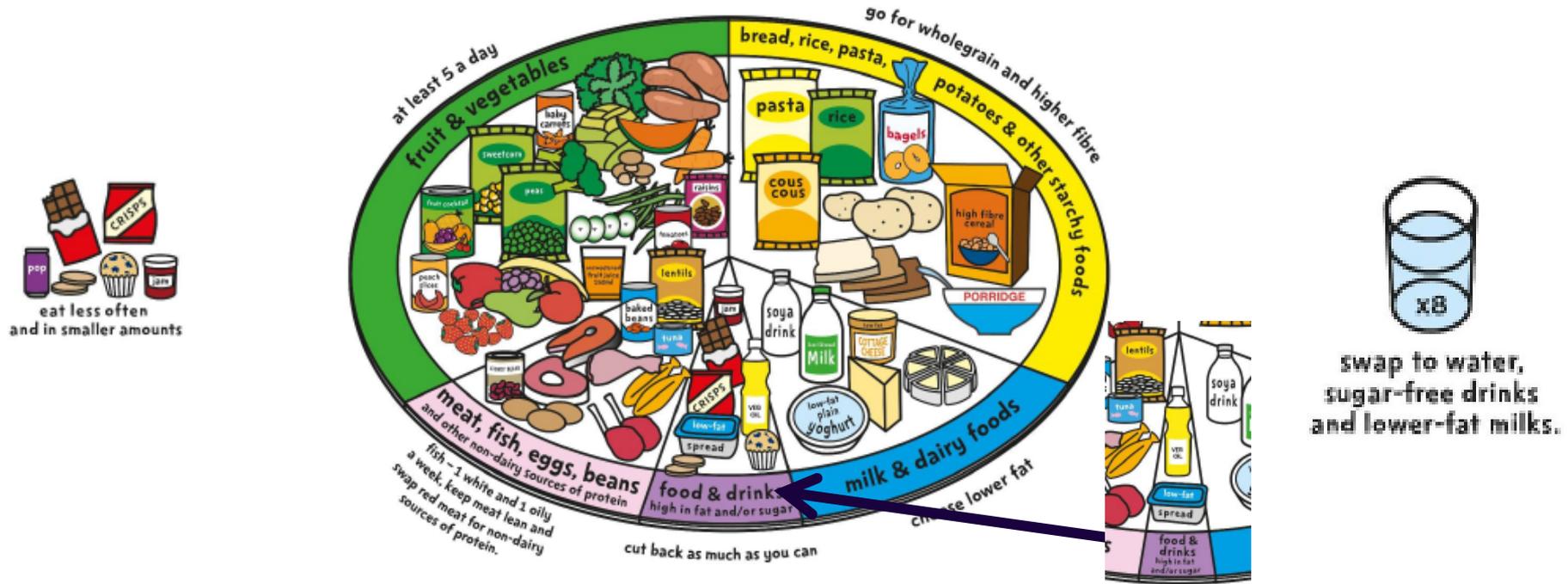
Response to different approaches across the key information areas of:

- water
- dealing with the purple segment
- labelling and additional messaging
- other information support

Requirements from overall design style (range of core foods shown\*, photographic vs drawn, raw vs cooked etc)

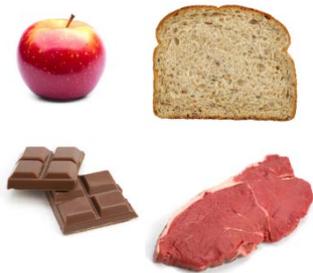
**A split does exist within the audience in terms of ideals for *design style* and *breadth of range of foods* based on current engagement with healthy eating. However, when considering purpose and efficiency, views for design approach are consistent.**

# Initial recommendations based on best performing elements



However, further testing is required to understand if elements can work together, how they are best placed in relation to each other and refine detail

# While there was a split in terms of stylistic preference/appeal, drawn was felt to perform best. Photographic had some specific positive attributes:



Overall considered:

- more 'naturalistic'
- more inspiring: real food, lots of choice, makes you think about eating/cooking

Raw food works better overall

- easier to recognise types
- cooked loses appetite appeal because cuts become unclear

New photography considered significant improvement on current plate

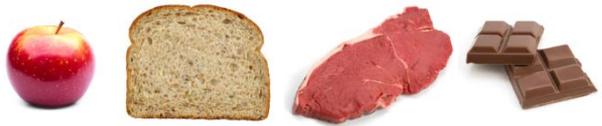
New food cards 'liked' best

- stimulus at advantage vs full execution on plate?

*I like the photographs because the food stands out better.  
It looks more appetizing because it looks like real food.  
[Female, 66, C1, Older independent, Birmingham]*



# ... but also some disadvantages



*Not that I think people are stupid but that pasta could be a pile of chips. On the drawn [version] the porridge says porridge, porridge, low fat yoghurt, cottage cheese wouldn't be able to identify on new photography so well.*  
[Female, young family, 22, C2, Cardiff]

## Harder to identify individual food items

Relies on existing knowledge

Can be off-putting when unclear (real food that I don't recognise/eat = not me)

- need to really study in some cases

More packaging required?

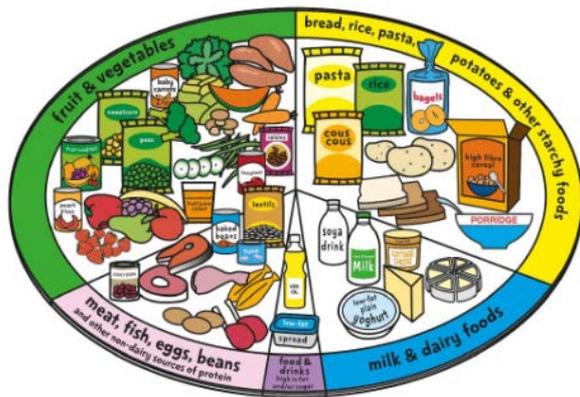
As real foods, less effective as emblems of food types than drawn items

Specificity of example means it shows particular type rather than category (eg bagel rather than 'bread')

In light of this, audience more likely to feel that items are missing and therefore requirement for number of examples increases



# Drawn style worked better for the 'less engaged' but was also acknowledged by others as likely more effective for an educational tool due to clarity



Generally clearer than photography

- Although some specific items need tweaking

Labelling of items helps specifically

- very clear what item is when written

Bright colours and colour contrast generally work well for stand out and initial visual appeal

Those familiar with C4L made associations with style

- tends to be positive

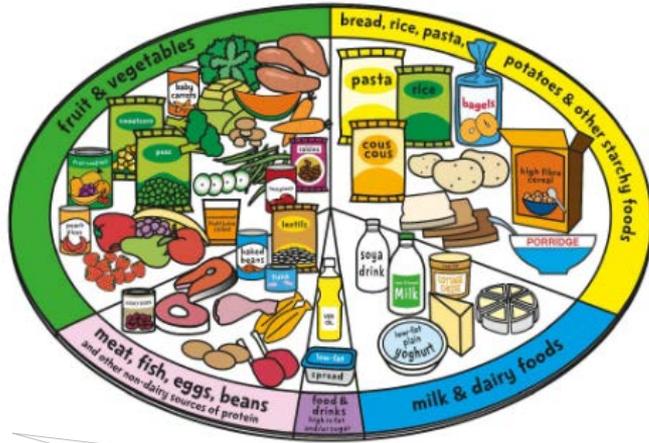
Raw items work better than cooked – easier to identify at a glance

Need for variety is reduced as items work in more emblematic way (eg bread, leafy greens)

*I would get the meaning straight away with the drawings one*  
[Female, Younger/Older Family, 48, C2, Glasgow]



# Importantly, the criticisms of drawn approach related to style rather than usability (c.f. photography)



*It looks more juvenile but it makes it clearer, you can identify with the text on individual items. Small logos and things are good for younger generation, on the drawn one you can see everything straight away where the lentils are, does no harm to label them all, better definition. [Male, Older Independent, 71, BC1, Belfast]*



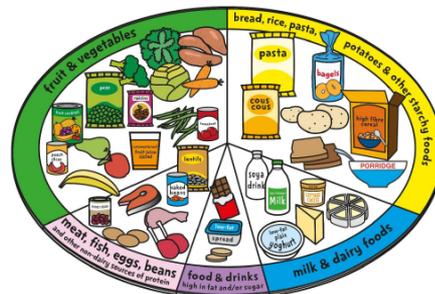
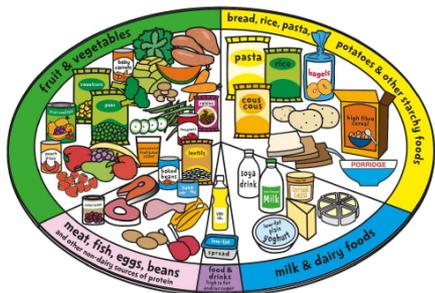
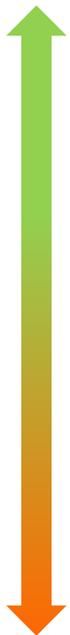
Drawn style = 'slightly childish'  
Especially for men

Linked to:

- primary colours (note: not necessarily an issue in own right/potentially compounded by combining with other factors below)
- heavy black line
- choice of font

Less inspiring than photography when thinking about what to buy or cook

# Across the sample, there was a general preference for more (rather than fewer) food items



While a few did prefer the fewer items plate as 'cleaner in design', including more items met the needs of the respondents in different ways:

For the more engaged, it helped address their desire for both inspiration and choice

For the less engaged, who were more inclined to take the example foods as recommended products:

- it helped show/communicate *variety* and *lots to choose from*
- increased potential for them to identify *foods they like*

**Recommendation at this stage is to show many foods rather than fewer foods**

# Cutlery adds to clarity of takeout of the overall visual as a plate but this gives an additional message that may not be ideal?



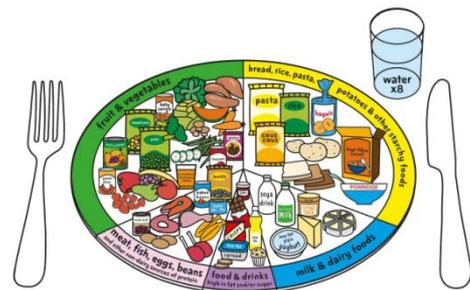
Knife and fork position circular device very clearly as a plate

- clarified further by title
- can contribute to engagement by giving 'eating' cues

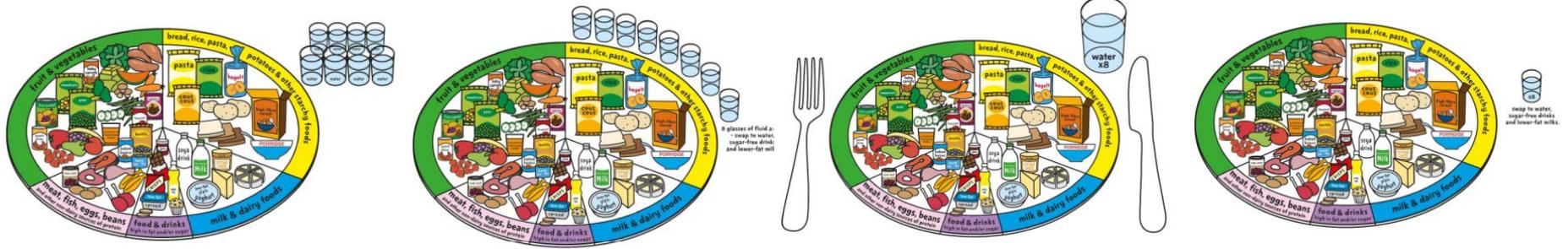
However, when seen as a plate, it delivers a message that the proportions shown are relevant to each plate consumed/every meal

Therefore, while overall proportions guidance is understood, there is additional implicit messaging to include all segments in every meal

Potentially better to just use title and other devices (see water and separated treats) to add engagement and exclude cutlery to encourage take out as plate-styled pie chart (rather than literal suggestion 'for each meal')

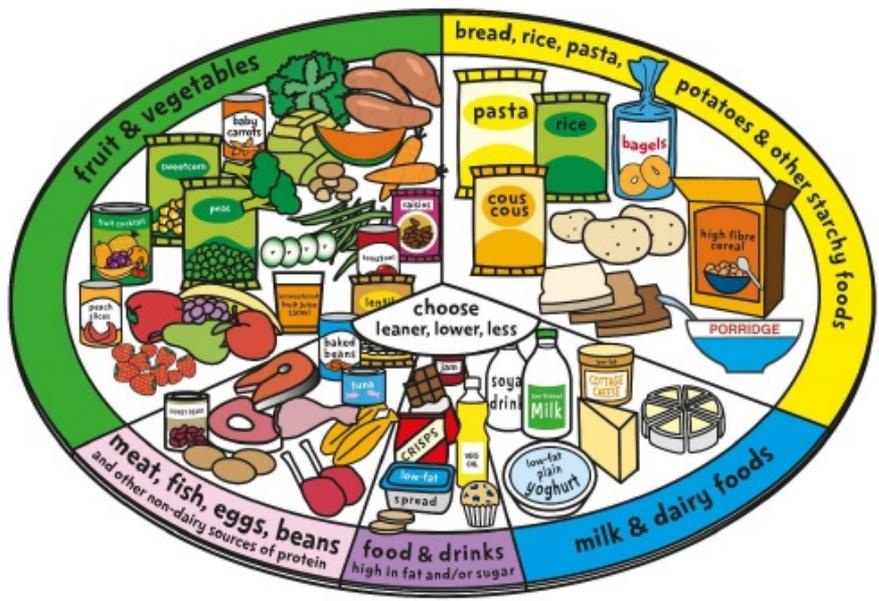
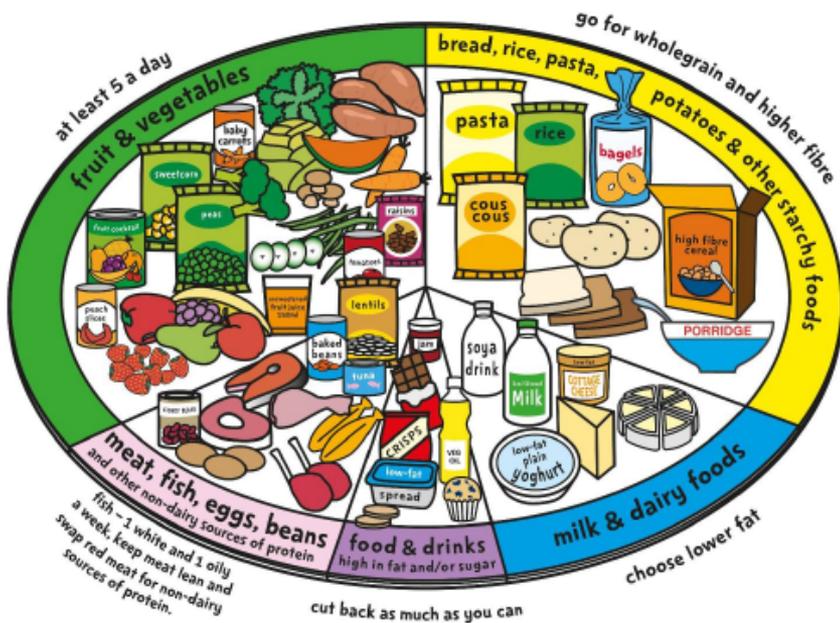


# Water message: Of four approaches tested, one was consistently preferred and felt to deliver the water message most clearly



**Recommendation is to develop single glass with optimised message.  
Size could be adjusted as required to design**

# Two approaches for additional messaging explored



# Overall, additional messaging increases impact of the plate on the audience and encourages a stronger/wider behavioural reaction



Delivers messages at two levels:

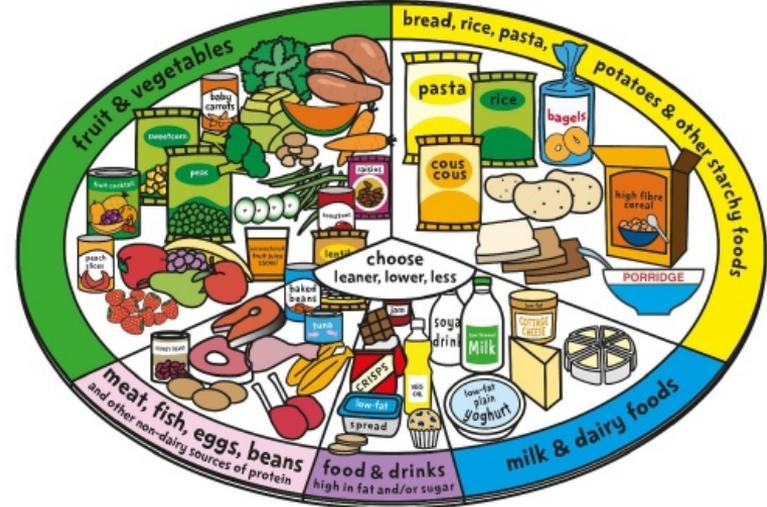
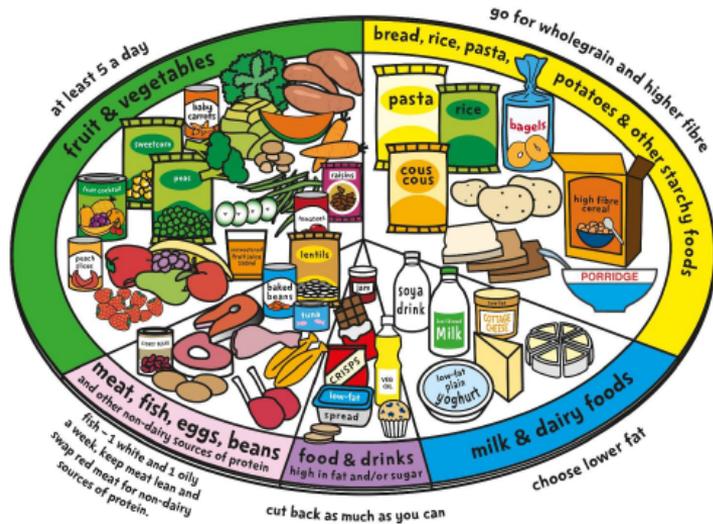
- *primary level* - aim for this ideal balance of these food groups every day
- *secondary level* - within each food group, aim to make healthier choices



Gives plate more educational value → user learns more than if not there

Qualifies/answers a few questions and raises a few others (eg portion size), encouraging engagement overall

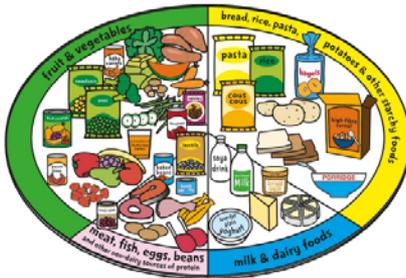
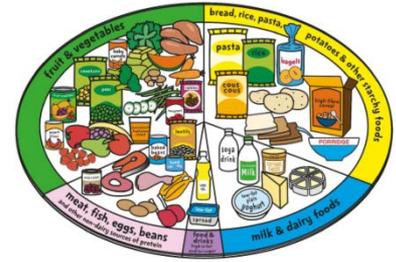
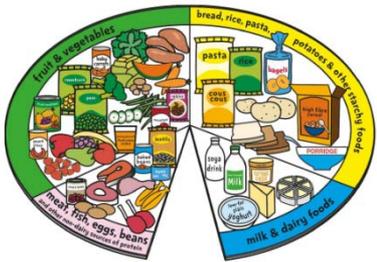
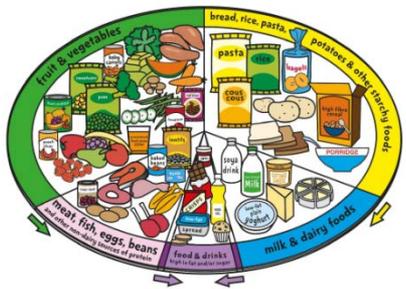
**On the whole, the wordier option (messaging on the outside of each segment) was felt to work best for stand alone communication than the shorter, integral option (leaner, lower, less) but some adjustments required by segment**



Outer messaging labels mostly understood but some suggestions for optimising content and tone ...

Route is not impossible to use but would need supporting with clearly accessible body copy. Outer labels seem to provide a better option by drawing information together by segment at point of reading

# Purple segment: Of five approaches tested, one worked to deliver clearer and more consistent messaging

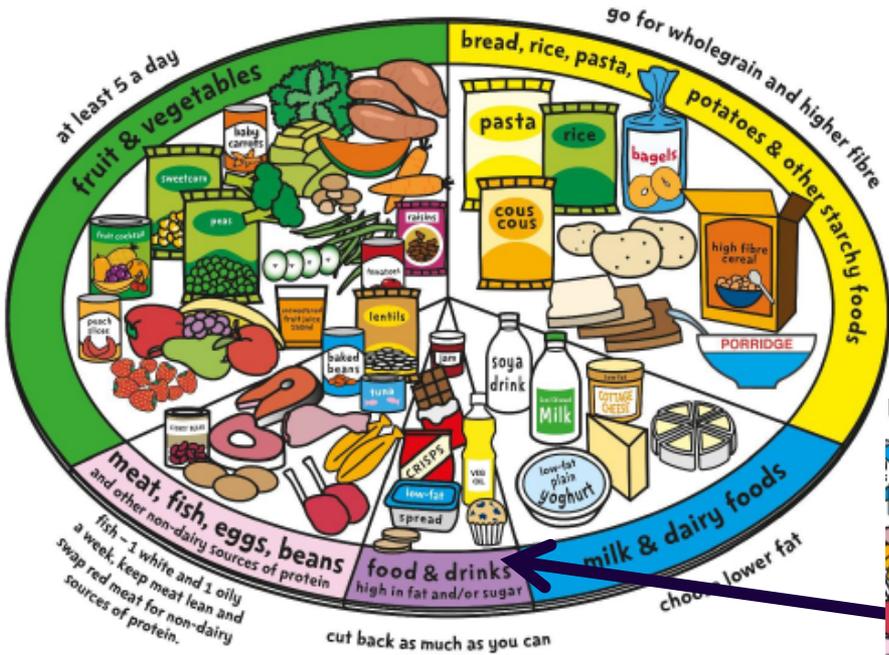


Overall *preference* to leave treat foods within plate  
 ✘ Legitimises consumption  
 But separated treats seems to fit better with 'healthy' without denying consumption

**Recommendation is to develop the approach which separates treats and ingredient foods – the purple segment is about high fat ingredients and high fat/sugar treats (food and drink) are set aside from the plate**

# Summary: Initial recommendations based on best performing elements

eat less often  
and in smaller amounts



swap to water,  
sugar-free drinks  
and lower-fat milks.



## Summary: Elements for testing further/detail refinement include:

Test placement of components to maximise take out of balanced overall diet and fluids message while retaining engagement

Test heading and qualifying line in combination with new plate design to check all works together

- develop and test any feasible alternatives (e.g. eatwell guide)

Develop and test:

- alternative segment labels (removed word 'food(s)' and 'drink(s)')
- tweaked segment messages
- new style of drawing and/or font to improve engagement and clarity

Test comprehension of food items taken forward for inclusion

Possibly develop and test:

- alternative way of displaying larger 'treats'/'eat in moderation' category on side (in box?)
- additional box with alcohol guidelines?

Develop supporting copy addressing key questions (e.g. overall diet not by meal, coffee and tea)

# About Public Health England

Public Health England exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. We do this through world-class science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. We are an executive agency of the Department of Health, and are a distinct delivery organisation with operational autonomy to advise and support government, local authorities and the NHS in a professionally independent manner.

Public Health England  
Wellington House  
133-155 Waterloo Road  
London SE1 8UG  
Tel: 020 7654 8000

[www.gov.uk/phe](http://www.gov.uk/phe)

Twitter: [@PHE\\_uk](https://twitter.com/PHE_uk)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland](https://www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland)

© Crown copyright 2016

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0. To view this licence, visit [OGL](https://www.ogcl.gov.uk) or email [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk). Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Published November 2016

PHE publications gateway number: 2016451