



Public Health  
England

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## External reference group – eatwell plate

**Paper for information: includes an update of the consumer research**

ERG/Eatwell plate/16/0

This paper provides an overview of the activity following the last meeting of the external reference group (ERG) which took place on 26 June 2015.

## Background

1. The eatwell plate is currently used by the government and its agencies as the cornerstone of healthy eating advice for the majority of the UK population aged 2 years and above. The image depicts the proportions in which each of the main food groups should be included in the overall diet to achieve a healthy balance.

## Modelling

2. The ERG previously provided advice on approaches to modelling and consumer research for the review of the eatwell plate.
3. The group considered linear programming the most comprehensive method to meet the needs of the refresh.
4. The absolute approach was considered the most likely to give a realistic model, inclusive of all foods incorporated in the NDNS data.
5. The modelling work has been completed by Oxford University and used to develop the stimulus material for phase 2 of the consumer research.

## Consumer research

6. The refresh of the eatwell plate involved two phases of consumer research.
7. The consumer research was conducted to ensure the food model was still relevant to the UK population in terms of comprehension and take-home messaging.
8. Each phase of research saw depth interviews, approximately 40 minutes in length, conducted on 152 individuals across all four nations. In all four countries, consumers ranged in:
  - Gender
  - Life stage
  - Ethnicity
  - Socio-economic grade
  - Internet accessibility.
9. Phase 1 of consumer research was used to test consumer accessibility and understanding of the food model as well as basic design preferences. Phase 2 explored consumer understanding further through the use of varying design styles to portray nutritional recommendations in line with updated government policy.

## **Phase 1 consumer research findings**

10. Phase 1 consumer research found that the current eatwell plate was widely recognised by consumers as having educational value.
11. Overall, the presentation of the food groups in a pie chart style highlighted discrepancies in current individual diets, indicating that it fulfils its role in providing a point of comparison in a way that is both accessible and assessable.
12. Phase 1 also revealed consumer preference for a greater number of food images in a drawn-style, as they found this more modern and engaging.

## **Phase 2 consumer research findings**

13. Phase 2 consumer research highlighted that consumers found the proposed models highly engaging and easy to use and understand. Generally there was a high level of consistency across nations and ethnicities in terms of perceived accessibility of design.
14. All images tested with consumers were considered easy to use, and the image was widely understood to describe the overall proportions of different food types that should comprise a healthy diet.
15. Consumers appreciated drawn food images, category descriptors and supporting messages. This included guidance on hydration and food labelling.
16. Consumers generally understood the food illustrations to be emblematic and directional as oppose to exhaustive.
17. Overall, an amalgamation of elements from all formats was found to be more favourable than any one.

## **Final model**

18. PHE will be taking the conclusions of the research into the final development of a refreshed model to be launched in 2016.

Nutrition Advice Team  
Health and Wellbeing  
March 2016