

SAT FAT NATION: **IS BRITAIN EATING** **ITSELF TO DEATH** ?

A YouGovStone event sponsored by Unilever

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Foreword from Dave Lewis, Chairman Unilever UK & Ireland:

Unilever has been promoting heart health since the 1950's when scientists first established the link between saturated fats and coronary heart disease. Unilever was asked by the medical community to make a lower saturated fat alternative to butter and Flora was created as a result. Since then, Flora has continued to champion research into the beneficial role of unsaturated fats in the diet and Unilever remains committed to using its heart health research and expertise to continue building awareness and changing attitudes about heart health.

In May 2008, Unilever commissioned research to analyse the weekly eating habits of 11,000 people across the UK. The results supported previous Government research findings, which revealed that 88% of men and 83% of women in the UK are exceeding Government guidelines on eating saturated fat. In light of these findings Unilever is sponsoring tonight's debate to generate open and informed discussion around Britain's saturated fat consumption. We're looking forward to a dynamic, engaging and informed discussion and welcome your views on the subject.

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Chair and panellists

Tonight's debate is chaired by broadcaster and author, John Humphrys. The topic, "Sat Fat Nation: Is Britain Eating Itself To Death?", will be discussed amongst the following panellists:



John Humphrys
Broadcaster and Author



Dr John Briffa
Nutritionist and Food
Writer



Dr Sarah Jarvis
GP and Chairman,
Health Care Committee,
HEART UK



Dr Mike Fitzpatrick
GP and Author of
Tyranny of Health



Prof. Simon Capewell
Professor of Clinical
Epidemiology, University
of Liverpool



**Dame Deirdre
Hutton, CBE**
Chair, Food
Standards Agency



Esther Rantzen, CBE
Broadcaster and Journalist

Sat Fat Nation: The View from the Top

8 out of 10 opinion leaders in the UK believe there needs to be greater understanding amongst the public about the health issues surrounding saturated fat. An even higher proportion, 9 out of 10, feel Britons should be helped or encouraged to reduce their saturated fat consumption.

These are the results of an opinion survey of 583 influential people, conducted by YouGovStone for Unilever, to accompany tonight's event. Surveyed in early August 2008, these 'influentials' included those at the top of their field in politics, business, charity, media, education and health.

Other highlights of the research with these agenda-setters include:

- 96% were aware there are possible health issues surrounding saturated and unsaturated fats, but only 23% of these were very confident what the issues were;
- 86% felt consumers must take more responsibility for what they eat, while 77% said it was also the job of manufacturers, and 67% said retailers;
- Teaching healthy eating in schools as part of the national curriculum to help cut saturated fat consumption should be made a priority, said 80%;
- Advice from doctors was thought to have the most positive effect generally on our diet with 50% saying they have a lot or at least some effect.

Comments from the survey respondents are shown in italics throughout this document.

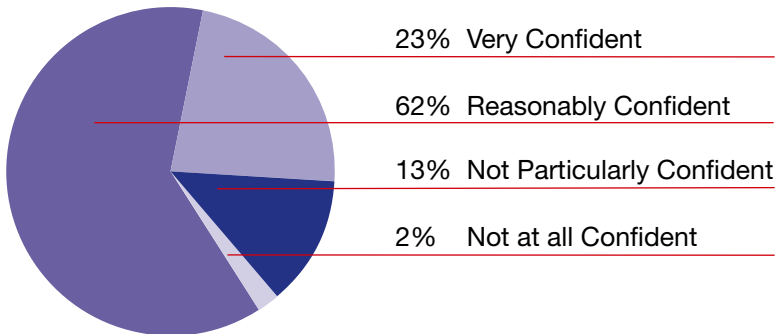
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Main findings

There is very high awareness (96%) amongst the influentials sampled of possible health issues surrounding saturated and unsaturated fats. But only 23% of those aware were very confident of what they actually were. A further 62% said they were reasonably confident. 13% said they were not particularly confident and 2% said they were not at all confident.

HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU IN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE POSSIBLE HEALTH ISSUES SURROUNDING THE CONSUMPTION OF SATURATED AND UNSATURATED FATS? (BASE: 96% AWARE OF POSSIBLE HEALTH ISSUES)



The influentials have some sympathy with the public; two thirds (66%) agree "it is difficult to know how much saturated fat you are consuming". However over half (56%) disagreed that "modern lifestyles are too busy and complex to keep track of what is in your food". One major concern was that "for many people price is more important than what is in their food" which 87% agreed with. 55% thought "those on limited budgets are less able to improve the healthiness of their diet".

“The cheapest foods are often the ones that are the worst offenders and more healthy and cost effective food should be made available for those who are on a strict food budget, especially pensioners and large families.”

Personal

10% of the influentials throw caution to the wind saying "I am not concerned about eating more saturated fat than the Government advises as I do not believe it will have a negative effect on my health", but three quarters (74%) disagree. 30% say "I am willing to trade off any possible negative effects of eating saturated fats against the benefits I enjoy, such as better tasting food", but 50% disagree.

There was some questioning of the received wisdom about saturated fat issues and scepticism surrounding Government research, citing Mediterranean diets and other unspecified research, but this was limited. An "all in moderation" attitude seems to prevail.

“ Health issues don't appear as clear-cut as Government would have us believe. Balance is the key to good diet. I'm not sure Government is very widely believed on 'good for your health' issues ”

Taking Steps

59% believe that health problems related to saturated fat will only get worse. There is strong support for trying to improve the situation with 81% agreeing that "there needs to be greater understanding amongst the public about the claimed health issues surrounding saturated fat".

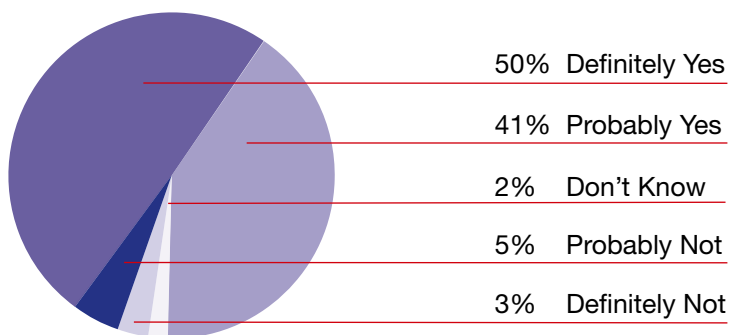
“ It is difficult to know where socially desirable information-giving ends and sponsoring a nanny-state begins. Over-publicising might possibly produce an anti feeling, but over-publicising is still preferable to having a public uninformed of possible dangers to it. It's a tricky line to define. ”

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When asked how aware the public was that (according to Government research) it is consuming more saturated fat than is advised, the influentials thought awareness was mediocre at best. Given a scale from 'very aware' (1) to 'not at all aware' (10), the mean was 6.1. When asked if the public was aware that eating too much saturated fat may lead to major health problems (according to Government research) the mean was similar at 5.9.

DO YOU FEEL BRITONS SHOULD BE HELPED OR ENCOURAGED TO REDUCE THEIR SATURATED FAT CONSUMPTION?



91% of influentials feel the public should be helped or encouraged to reduce their saturated fat consumption. When given a list of 13 items to help achieve this, and asked which should be prioritised, the most popular answer was to "teach healthy eating in schools as part of the national curriculum", selected by 80%. Several people spontaneously suggested we should bring back 'home economics' lessons. 75% advocated "encourage people to take more exercise" and 74% chose "clearer food labelling in supermarkets based on sensible portion sizes". Other ideas mentioned included subsidies for healthy foods, encouraging more cooking from scratch and better cooking skills, and more regulation of advertising.

Taking Steps (contd.)

Which of the following, if any, do you believe should be prioritised to help cut saturated fat consumption in the UK? (Select as many as you wish)	%
Teach healthy eating in schools as part of the national curriculum	80%
Encourage people to take more exercise	75%
Clearer food labelling in supermarkets based on sensible portion sizes	74%
Provide general information on fat consumption to help educate the public	69%
All public institutions should limit high fat products	68%
Promote simple changes that reduce consumption levels e.g. switching to skimmed milk and margarine	63%
Ban promotional links between high fat foods and sporting events	45%
Encourage smaller portion sizes	43%
Restaurants should display fat content of dishes	43%
Legislation to cut fat levels in food and drink	42%
High fat products should carry a clear Government health warning similar to cigarette packets	37%
Introduce a tax on particularly high fat foods	19%
NHS should provide appetite suppressants on prescription	8%
Other	6%

For the 6% of respondents working in the health sector, limiting high fat products in our institutions (e.g. schools, hospitals, prisons) came top (91%). Those in academia/education chose clearer food labelling as top (79%) while those in Government/politics selected teaching in schools (78%).

“ I think helping the public see the damage it can do their bodies if they eat too much is essential. I'm all for graphic adverts of clogged up arteries if it gets the message across. ”

“ Schools should teach cooking and food prep skills to children as a compulsory subject from primary school upwards to move our culture away from pre-prepared and convenience products. I know people in their thirties and below who do not know how to cook even basic foods. Their diets are totally comprised of pre-prepared and pre-packaged meals! That is shocking. ”

“ Given the distorted supply chain in the UK (very dominant supermarkets and food porn ads) we need positive pressure from Government to force healthy living/eating and wellness on the consumer. This cannot be left to market forces. This is an issue over which central Government needs to act firmly. ”

“ I do feel that the public tend to blame the Government, food manufacturers and even celebrity chefs for the public's high consumption of saturated fats in this country. I feel that a lot more emphasis should be placed on parents to encourage their children to eat more healthily. I do support the idea that schools should introduce healthier but appetising school meals in their canteen. ”

Positive Effects on our Diet and Taking Responsibility

Doctors topped a list of people or factors that were believed to positively affect the healthiness of the British public's diet. 50% scored doctors 1 or 2 out of 5, where 1 is 'affected a lot' and 5 is 'not affected at all'. The '5-a-day' campaign (45%), and the media (43%) came next. Government advice was bottom of the list with just 15% scoring it 1 or 2.

86% said consumers should take more responsibility for what they eat than they currently do. 77% thought manufacturers should take more, 67% said retailers should, while 37% thought it was for the Government/regulators to do so. 47% of 'influentials' felt that Government/regulators get it about right at present.

“ I believe that it is the responsibility of the individual to make the choice, and the responsibility of the manufacturers, retailers and Government to give the individual the tools and information to make the choice. ”

“ The British public is almost childlike in its refusal to take responsibility for what it eats. ”

“ I welcome this survey as I truly believe that the public must be educated about how they should be meeting their nutritional needs and not just confronted with multiple celebrity chefs preparing gourmet meals at a time when as a nation we have never prepared less meals. ”

Survey Methodology

The survey was completed online by members of the YouGovStone ThinkTank – a network of over 3,000 influential people who regularly take part in research.

Around half the ThinkTank members were invited to complete the study and 583 completed it successfully. Fieldwork ran from July 31st to August 6th 2008.

Respondents represented a cross-section of influential people including politicians/Government (9%), business leaders (48%), broadcasters and journalists (20%), charity directors (13%), academics (10%), leading health professionals (6%) and those in culture/leisure (9%), with many in more than one category.

A chance for 'open-ended' feedback was provided throughout the survey and quotes from respondents are shown here in italics.

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