

UK WOMEN CONFUSED BY INCREASE IN NEW HEALTH TERMINOLOGY

Three quarters of all UK women claim they no longer know what constitutes a healthy diet, according to a survey released today. The report, commissioned by SUNSWEEET® Prunes, suggests that conflicting expert advice, coupled with an increase in new health terminology, has led to the confusion.

UK women have never been as health conscious as they are today, but the findings suggest that while as a nation we are generally taking more of an interest in our nutritional intake (70% of women have made changes in the last year), for most, there is now a new minefield to navigate with 74% of women claiming they often find themselves bamboozled by increasingly used terminology and conflicting health advice.

The survey of 1000 women revealed that one in five has gone so far as to lie about understanding new terminology to avoid embarrassment in front of friends, family and colleagues. This figure rose to 37% in Yorkshire and 42% in the North East, where the pressure appears to be greatest. When it comes to age, the 16-24 year old group appeared the most affected, with 28% admitting to have lied; although 26% of the 45-54 year old age group also opted to pretend rather than come clean.

Researchers quizzed respondents on some of the most widely used terminology, such as 'antioxidants', 'free radicals' and 'probiotics'. Of those who claimed to know and understand them, researchers found a significant proportion were actually unable to provide the correct definitions when asked; highlighting the scale of the confusion.

'Antioxidant' is probably one of the most well known new terms, however, 38% still failed to get the right definition, with some respondents believing that they 'made you age' and 'removed oxygen'.

Only half of all those who claimed to know about free radicals actually knew they were involved in causing cancer, heart disease and arthritis, with even fewer knowing that antioxidants played a part in combating them.

Of the one in three people who said they were familiar with the term probiotic, many cited its association with yoghurt advertising and the phrase 'good bacteria'; however one in five people were still unsure as to what that actually meant in terms of benefiting their health, with some believing it was the opposite to antibiotic and ten percent believing it was purely an advertising gimmick.

Amanda Bishop, SUNSWEEP Europe comments, "Research such as this is invaluable when assessing how much our customers know about some of the newer terminology being used, in particular for us, regarding antioxidants. While we know prunes have the highest ORAC* (antioxidant) rating of any fruit or vegetable, these findings show there is still clearly a need to educate UK consumers as to why these are important to us."

Nutritional Consultant and Health Journalist of the Year, Michael van Straten, comments, "In many ways it doesn't surprise me that people are confused by the amount of terminology and conflicting messages around today. While on one level it is good that people are increasingly more aware of what they are eating, we need to ensure that new information is supported by the right level of education."

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- Tickbox survey carried out Oct 2004
- *ORAC - Oxygen Radical Absorption Capacity is a test tube analysis that measures the total antioxidant power of foods and other chemical substances per 100g. Antioxidant Analysis from the Human Nutrition Centre at Tufts University in Boston, USA.
- Find out all you need to know about ORAC in 'The Oracle Diet' by Michael van Straten, published by Kyle Cathie Ltd