OBJECTIVES

• To explore what older people living in the community understand about age-adjusted nutrition and food consumption guidelines
• To explore food preferences and perception of tasty nutritious food
• To identify concerns relating to the access and provision of nutritious tasty food
• To identify how information can be provided that might improve the consumption of nutritious tasty food by older people

METHODS

Data was collected using a 4 page survey consisting of 14 questions pertaining to diet, food preferences and National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) nutritional guideline understanding. The survey was sent in advance to community clubs and associations as well as directly distributed by group members during the study period. A total of 46 surveys were collected. Data was analysed qualitatively.

Table 1: Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>65-87, mean 72</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>19 male, 26 female, 1 unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>17 Renmark, 13 Barmera, 16 elsewhere in Riverland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living arrangement</td>
<td>41 independent, 5 other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household</td>
<td>16 living alone, 24 with one other person, 6 with &gt;1 person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESULTS

Figure 1: Self-reported understanding of healthy eating guidelines

- On average, people who perceived their knowledge as excellent, incorrectly calculated the number of serving sizes for 2-3 of the 6 food groups.
- People who perceived their knowledge as good got 3-4 groups incorrect.

Figure 2: Barriers to healthy eating

- Don't know how to prepare
- Can't afford healthy food
- Healthy food hard to access
- Physical difficulty in preparation
- Food enjoyed not healthy
- Time poor
- Medically restricted diet

Figure 3: Factors influencing food selection

- Appearance
- Texture
- Taste
- Nutritional value
- Price
- Packaging
- Convenience

Figure 4: Information for which better future access is desired

- NHMRC guidelines
- Shopping budgeting
- Food prep/cooking
- Targeted for medical conditions

Figure 5: Preferred mode of receiving information

- Magazine/book
- TV/DVD
- Radio
- Internet
- Health Professionals
- Public presentation
- Help in home

CONCLUSIONS

Actual knowledge of the NHMRC nutritional guidelines was lacking, despite perceived good understanding by survey participants. The guidelines themselves were the information most desired by participants, and the most commonly cited preferred mode of receiving them was via magazine or book. Taste and nutrition were singled out as the most important factors influencing food selection, whilst a diet restricted by a medical condition or medication was identified as the number one barrier to healthy eating.

LIMITATIONS

• Some participants found the survey format confusing and/or arduous
• 'Junk food' was omitted as a category in the survey
• A focus group and cooking demonstration was originally included as part of the study and would have yielded further insight into the topic

Community comments

- "I would love meal and shopping plans"
- "Healthy eating workshops"
- "I would like groceries delivered"
- "Healthy guidelines from my cardiologist & naturopath have helped my healthy eating"
- "I grew up in a good family and we ate good food"
- "Due to my medical condition, more preparation and selection is required"

Supervised by Dr Elena Rudnik PhD and Rachel Hampshire