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Australiaâ??s dietary habits at risk: CSIROÂ

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The CSIRO Healthy Diet Score report, released by Australiaâ??s national science agency, canvassed the dietary habits of over 235,000 adults across the country between 2015-2023.

The results revealed an average diet score of 55 out of 100 â?? and highlights some of the Australians most at risk from their eating habits.

Dr Gilly Hendrie, CSIRO Research Scientist and co-author of the CSIRO Healthy Diet Score report said although Australians are often perceived as fit and healthy, the low collective score shows that we just meet the pass mark when it comes to adopting the national dietary recommendations.

â??The score is a stark reminder of the work that needs to be done to improve our eating habits and reduce the national waistline,â?• Dr Hendrie said.

People across Australia, in all occupations and age groups, were invited to participate in the online survey between May 2015 and July 2023. The survey assesses nine areas of diet quality and estimates compliance with the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

CSIRO researchers have used this information to create a detailed picture of the countryâ??s eating habits.

When it comes to dietary performance, Australians fall short when it comes to discretionary or junk foods.

At about 28 servings per week, the discretionary food component was the lowest scoring area of diet quality across all age and sex groups with a score of 20 out of 100. Alcohol, cakes and biscuits, chocolate and confectionery, and takeaway foods

were found to be the biggest contributors.

The average score for vegetables was 58 out of 100, with only four out of 10 adults reporting eating three or more different vegetables at their main meal - an indicator of a healthy diet.

According to the report, the closest Australians got to meeting the Australian Dietary Guidelines was with beverages, achieving a score of 93 out of 100. This high score was achieved by predominantly choosing water over energy-dense drinks such as soft drinks or juice.

Meats and alternatives came in second with Australians registering a collective score of 78 out of 100 for compliance with the dietary guidelines.

Construction workers were among those with the poorest diets (51/100), while retired Australians and those working in the fitness industry reported some of the healthiest eating patterns (59/100).

Those working in construction and the beauty/fashion industry reported the highest discretionary food consumption, at around 45 servings per week.

The report also showed that while women only have a slightly better diet quality than men (56 v 53/100), their vegetable intake is markedly higher (62 vs 54/100).

"The good news is that a healthy diet can be achieved with some simple changes,â? Dr Hendrie said.

â??The things to keep in mind are reduce, increase and add variety. In other words, reduce the amount of discretionary foods being consumed, increase healthy foods including fruit and dairy and alternatives, and aim for variety by eating three or more different types of vegetables with your main meal.

â??Improving our collective score is important to increasing our wellbeing, tackling Australiaâ??s obesity crisis, and mitigating lifestyle diseases such as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and some cancers,â? Dr Hendrie said.