



**For immediate release**

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### **Digesting the facts: Is dietary ignorance harming the nation's health?**

Is it any wonder that Britain is in the grip of an obesity epidemic - with a recent Government report revealing that the rate of obesity in British adults is now officially the worst in Europe<sup>1</sup>? Not when you consider that over half of Brits admit to being confused about the health benefits of food.

New research released today by Yakult<sup>2</sup> suggests that the nation's dietary issues may stem in part from lack of knowledge; people are simply not aware which foods they should be eating in order to benefit their health.

Almost a quarter of people claim they are unaware that certain foods offer genuine protective properties against disease. This revelation is especially worrying at a time when the nation's cancer rates are at an all time high.

Food can be one of our best weapons against obesity and diseases such as cancer, and yet many Brits simply do not understand its full potential. Moreover, it has emerged that Brits are confused not just over what to eat, but also *how* to eat it; the survey revealed that over a third of people rush through meals, whilst 30% regularly eat the same foods, failing to add any variety to their diet.

But, while this may seem to suggest that we will continue to slip further into obesity, encouragingly it appears that people do want to change their habits. 92% of people would be prepared to adapt their current diet to help improve their health – so help and advice on how to do this could be the key to change.

One solution is to provide education on all aspects of diet and health from an early age, so that an understanding of food becomes second nature. There

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<sup>1</sup> Audit Commission report, 2007

can be few better examples of this than in Japan, where children are taught about the important functions and benefits of food from a very young age.

The results of this approach speak for themselves: the Japanese people enjoy the longest life expectancy in the world and experience lower rates of many serious diseases than their Western counterparts. And why? Well much opinion suggests that their diet may be a key factor.

The traditional Japanese diet is based on staples of fish, rice, vegetables, soy products and fermented foods, with barely any red meat and very little dairy produce.

In recent times, however, this traditional Japanese diet has undergone a degree of westernisation, with red meat and dairy products being consumed far more frequently. Although excessive consumption of such foods is not encouraged, this fusion of Eastern and Western dietary habits is actually considered by many experts to provide an optimal balance of nutrition.

*Nutritionist Fiona Hunter explains why adopting the Japanese attitude towards food and adding Eastern touches to your diet can make a real difference:*

“The Japanese people tend to have a healthy attitude towards food as well as a healthy diet. Children receive nutrition lessons in school and are taught only about the benefits of certain foods, but also how to ‘treat’ food – learning to balance their food and take time for meals.

“The traditional Japanese diet is itself one of the healthiest in the world. It contains few processed foods and many natural ingredients, enabling a higher intake of essential nutrients. It is generally very low in fat, so preventing cholesterol build-up in the arteries which leads to heart disease.

“Since many diseases are linked with a diet high in fat, refined carbs and red meat, and low fruit and vegetable intake, it is clear that the Japanese diet could well help promote good health and protect against illness.

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<sup>2</sup> Healthy Eating survey conducted by ICM on behalf of Yakult UK, 1,066 respondents, October 2007

However, there are some downsides– the diet is generally high in salt and can be low in protein and calcium due to the low intake of meat and dairy respectively. This is why a marriage of Eastern and Western dietary habits could strike the optimal balance and provide the perfect eating plan.”

*Follow Fiona’s top tips for bringing a healthy flavour of the Orient into your diet:*

**Fill up on fish:** The Japanese consume around 400g of fish every day. Fish is rich in vitamin A and omega-3 fatty acids, which offer numerous health benefits. Try to eat fish at least twice week and prepare your fish the Japanese way – grill, bake, or use it to make a healthy soup.

**Vegetable variety:** The Japanese diet contains a number of staple vegetables (including mushrooms, sweet potato and bamboo shoots), along with a high quantity of ‘cruciferous’ vegetables (such as cabbage and broccoli), which are rich in phytochemicals renowned for their potential to protect against certain types of cancer.

**Enjoy soy:** The Japanese diet includes a wide variety of soy products such as tofu and miso. Not only is soy high in protein and low in fat, but research has also indicated that the phytoestrogens contained within it may help to actively safeguard against certain cancers (including breast and prostate).

**Meat in moderation:** Small amounts of lean red meat, pork and chicken will provide protein essential for growth and repair of cells. Keep portions modest and use low fat cooking methods such as roasting, grilling or stir frying.

**Super seaweed:** The Japanese consume vast quantities of seaweed which is rich in antioxidants and minerals (especially iodine, important for thyroid function). Try adding seaweed to soups or stir fries.

**Just your cup of (green) tea:** The typical Japanese diet includes three cups per day. Green tea contains potent antioxidants, thought to protect against certain types of cancer, and has also been linked to a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease.

**Go easy on dairy:** Although dairy foods are beginning to feature more heavily within the Japanese diet, the average amount consumed remains significantly lower than in the UK. Dairy products provide vital calcium and so should be consumed – but in moderation. Choose low and reduced fat dairy products whenever possible

**Superior bacteria:** Follow the long-standing Japanese trend of consuming 'probiotic' drinks such as Yakult (the original probiotic drink, developed in Japan in the 1930s). These contain high quantities of good bacteria, promoting a healthy digestive system and therefore supporting the body's natural defences.

**Take your time:** The Japanese take time preparing and presenting their food, and teach children to respect food and mealtimes. We should all adopt this habit, learning to appreciate mealtimes and dedicate quality time to eating, thus giving our digestive system a far better chance of processing our food effectively.

**Variety is the spice of life:** The Japanese diet puts a great emphasis on variety –Japanese children are encouraged within nutrition classes to consume thirty different foods every day. We should follow this example and eat a wide variety of foods in order to obtain a wide variety of nutrients.

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#### **Yakult**

- Yakult is the original probiotic. It was developed in 1935 by Dr Shirota, at Kyoto University in Japan.
- Dr Shirota was a powerful advocate of preventative medicine. He believed healthy intestines helped give good health and a long life. His philosophy – *Working on a healthy society* – aims to improve physical, mental and social health.
- Yakult has nearly 75 years in bacteriological research and has achieved global recognition in the use of friendly bacteria in foods, cosmetics and pharmaceuticals. Research continues at the Yakult Central Institute in Japan and the company also works closely with scientific and medical communities to increase understanding of the role of friendly bacteria in health.
- Today Yakult is consumed by 25 million people in 28 countries world-wide.