

Consumer Liaison Group Newsletter

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Jan 2015

~ Visits and Meetings ~

(1) The Consumer Liaison Group (CLG) convened its fifth discussion meeting in the evening of 10 February 2014 at the Communication Resource Unit (CRU) of Centre for Food Safety (CFS). The meeting was under the theme of “Safe and Smart Ways to Cook” and aimed to explore members’ food handling practices and preferences. The main points of the discussion were as follows:

Awareness of potential food risks: Some of the members were able to point out the potential food risks, such as toxins in puffer fish, pathogens in raw oysters and salmonella in raw eggs. However, some did not know that shellfish poisoning toxins could not be destroyed through cooking and thought scallops were completely safe after they were thoroughly cooked.

Experiences of eating high risk foods: Only two members had tried puffer fish, being attracted by its delicate flavor and distinguishing features. Most of the members had tried raw oysters and they would choose those from uncontaminated waters. Some had tried raw eggs because they were unaware of hygiene and safety issues then. No members had tried picking wild mushrooms.

Frequently used cooking methods and awareness of processed contaminants resulting from dry heat cooking (frying, grilling, barbecuing and baking) at high temperatures: Most of the members cooked food at home by steaming, stewing and boiling as often as possible. Most of them were aware of the fact that high temperature cooking might produce carcinogens. Yet few had the practice of blanching vegetable before stir-frying because they thought it was both time-consuming and unnecessary.

Promotion of proper ways to prepare and cook

food: Some members opined that promotion efforts should be targeted at children (such as kindergarten students). Some suggested producing more television programmes and working with columnists. They also suggested the CFS providing more advice to members of the public about healthier food materials and healthy ways to cook without sacrificing flavor.

(2) The sixth CLG meeting was held in the evening of 26 June 2014 at the CRU, to understand members’ knowledge, attitude and behavior in relation to reduction of sodium and sugars. The main points of the discussion were as follows:

Perception of sodium and sugars consumption: Most of the members were able to identify diseases (e.g. kidney diseases) connected to excessive intake of sodium. They all felt that the term “salt”, which was commonly used and easy to understand, was a better word choice than “sodium” in communication. No one knew the upper limit for sodium intake, nor did they know their own daily sodium and sugars intake because they could not figure out the amount of sodium and sugars in the food and condiments when dining out.

How to figure out sodium and sugars content in food products: A majority of members assessed the level of sodium and sugars in food based on how it tasted. Most of them were aware that prepackaged food products were required to label sodium and sugars content by law. However, some queried that it was not accurate to allow products containing small amount of sodium or sugar to use “zero” claims. And the government should also set requirements on the size of food labels for the sake of legibility.

Confidence, difficulties and ways of reducing

sodium and sugars intake: Some members felt that they could successfully reduce sodium and sugars consumption for health's sake while some were not so sure because of long-established dietary habits. Factors inhibiting sodium and sugars reduction included difficulties in controlling the sodium content of foods when dining out, the need to accommodate other people's dietary preferences and lack of low sodium food options offered in restaurants. Members suggested promoting sodium and sugars reduction from different aspects including encouraging manufacturers to provide foods of different sugars and sodium content, requiring restaurants to offer food low in sugars and salt at a cheap price, as well as educating the children about the health consequences of eating too much sodium and sugars.

Purchase and perception of foods lower in sodium and sugars: Only one member would regularly purchase foods lower in sodium and sugars. Some would compare nutrition labels of different brands. Members perceived that foods lower in sodium and sugars were light-flavoured, more expensive and less common.

(3) On 28 November 2014, CLG members visited the factory of Hong Kong Yakult Co. Ltd. in Tai Po Industrial Estate to get a better insight into the manufacturing process of beverages. Before the visit, we took the opportunity to hold the seventh CLG meeting to find out members' view on risk perception on different food hazards. Below were the major points discussed:

Difference between food hazards and food risks: Members were able to list different food hazards, including colouring matter, chemical additives and plasticizers. They, however, did not understand

what risks and hazards were, nor could they tell the difference between hazards and risks. Some members were unaware of the existence of hazards in daily food (such as allergens in shrimp). They had the notion that risk arising from an individual's own health condition (e.g. allergic to a certain food) was not considered as a hazard.

Knowledge about various food hazards: All members had heard about the five food hazards mentioned in the question (i.e. foreign gene / protein of genetically modified food, paralytic shellfish poisoning toxins in scallops, norovirus in oysters, *Listeria monocytogenes* in refrigerated food and tetrodotoxin), yet few knew further details, nor could they state the health effects of certain food hazards on humans.

Perception of risk level of various hazards and why: Most of the members considered tetrodotoxin, being lethally poisonous and no known antidote, the most dangerous hazard. Paralytic shellfish poisoning toxins was considered the second most dangerous hazard as this toxin could not be destroyed by high temperatures and scallops was a common food choice. *Listeria monocytogenes* was considered the third dangerous hazard as refrigerated food was very common which made it hard to avoid and some pregnant women were unaware of the risks associated with it. Foreign gene / protein of genetically modified (GM) food was considered the fourth dangerous hazard as GM food was hard to identify and the effects on humans were yet to be known. Norovirus in oysters was considered the least dangerous hazard as the symptoms were mild.

To summarise, members generally held the view that greater health effects and lesser chance of avoiding it generated greater risks.

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Consumption of high risk food and why: Most of the members had the experience of eating high risk food. They also gave examples other than those mentioned in the question, such as raw eggs, game (civet cats) and hormone-injected chickens.

Perception and attitude towards food risk minimisation measures: Most of the members were aware of a few measures that could minimise food risks, which included farm-raised non-toxic puffer fish, and choosing food origin (such as choosing imported oysters). Some knew that the risks could be minimised by cooking and preparing food properly, such as having the viscera of scallops removed and having the food cooked thoroughly.

Impression and comments on CFS publications and promotional materials: Take *Listeria monocytogenes* as an example, most of the members said they had noticed the CFS's promotional efforts about this bacterium. However, they had divided impression on the promotional materials. To most of the members, press reports of risk assessment studies were just a blur. But some mentioned that they were particularly impressed with pamphlets which were handsomely printed. They proposed to place different promotional materials in different locations, such as placing pamphlets about *Listeria monocytogenes* at Maternal & Child Health Centres.

Labelling Quiz Competition and the award presentation ceremony were also held on the same day. Highlights have been uploaded onto the CFS website for browsing.

http://www.cfs.gov.hk/tc_chi/whatsnew/whatsnew_act/whatsnew_act_Food_Safety_Day_2014.html

~ Food Safety App ~

The Food Safety App was launched on 15 April 2014 to help people obtain notifications of food alerts, food safety news and publications anytime, anywhere. Users can retrieve food safety topics of interest by searching keywords and share food safety information via email and online social media. For details, please visit

http://www.cfs.gov.hk/tc_chi/food_safety_app/Food_Safety_App.html



~ Food Safety Day 2014 – Safe and Smart Ways to Cook ~

On 4 July 2014, Food Safety Day 2014 was held under the theme "Safe and Smart Ways to Cook" to promote safer cooking methods to the public and the food trade to help people cook properly and enjoy healthier food. The final round of the Secondary School Food Safety and Nutrition

~ Hong Kong's Action on Salt and Sugars Reduction Facebook page ~

CFS launched a new Facebook page designated for the theme of "Hong Kong's Action on Salt and Sugars Reduction" on 16 January 2015. The Facebook page is intended to provide information on salt and sugars reduction for internet users.



<https://www.facebook.com/HongKongsActiononSaltandSugarsReduction>

~ Salt and Sugars Reduction & Nutrition Labelling Video Competition ~

The CFS and the Education Bureau, in collaboration with the Committee on Home-School Co-operation, jointly launched the Salt and Sugars Reduction & Nutrition Labelling Video Competition. Entrants are required to produce a video to show the “how and why” of reducing dietary salt and sugars and how to apply nutrition labelling to reduce salt and sugars intake in daily lives.



http://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/whatsnew/whatsnew_act/Video_Competition_2015.html

~ Proposed Regulatory Framework on Nutrition and Health Claims on Infant Formula, Follow-up Formula, and Prepackaged Foods for Infants and Young Children Under the Age of 36 Months in Hong Kong ~

Nutrition and health claims have been widely used in various food products, including formula products (i.e. infant formula and follow-up formula) and prepackaged foods for infants and young children (“IYC foods”). Consuming food based on dubious nutrition or health claims made about them may have adverse impact on the consumer’s health. The Government proposes to establish a regulatory framework to enhance the regulation of nutrition and health claims on formula products and IYC foods. The Government welcomes your views on the proposed regulatory framework. For details, please visit http://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/whatsnew/whatsnew_fstr/whatsnew_fstr_Health_claim_consultation.html

