

# **General principles for the collection of national food consumption data in the view of a pan-European dietary survey**

Question number: EFSA-Q-2009-00758

Adopted: 11 December 2009

[Guidance](#) (513 KB)

## **Summary**

The availability of detailed and high quality food consumption data is essential to carry out many of EFSA's mandates. The collection of accurate and harmonised food consumption data at European level is therefore a primary long-term objective for EFSA which has been recognised as a top priority for collaboration with the EU Member States.

Methodologies and procedures used in dietary surveys have mainly been developed with the aim of evaluating the nutritional status of a population i.e. the intake of energy, macronutrients and/or micronutrients. Specific recommendations are needed in order to make the food consumption data collected through these methods more suitable for exposure assessment within the risk assessment process.

The methods and protocols described in this Guideline are intended to be followed for harmonising results within a common pan-European dietary survey. The main objective of the present Guideline is to recommend methods and protocols for the collection of dietary information that can be used to perform risk assessments for biological agents and chemical substances considered by EFSA's Scientific Committee and Scientific Panels.

The "Expert Group on Food Consumption Data" (EGFCD) through the Guideline stresses the importance of collecting accurate and harmonised food consumption data at the European level. It recommends that each national dietary survey should be conducted in two phases. One dietary survey phase includes children, divided into three age classes: infants, toddlers and other children. The other dietary survey phase includes all other subjects, with the exception of above the age of 75 years and older), again divided into three age classes: adolescents, adults and elderly. Pregnant women should be over-sampled and included in the same phase as the adults. A minimum of 1,000 subjects has to be included in each of the two dietary survey phases. A larger number of subjects is strongly recommended for the most populated EU Member States.

The dietary survey phase covering infants and children should be conducted using the dietary record method including two non-consecutive days and should, if possible, use EPIC-SOFT as a data entry system.

The dietary survey phase covering all other subjects (except those older than 75 years) should be conducted using the 24-hour recall method including two non-consecutive days. This is considered the most cost-effective method and the main arguments in favour of this choice are that 24-hour recall is less of a burden for the subjects and thus will increase the participation rate, and since it is independent of literacy rates in different parts of the population it can be better implemented.

The EGFCFCD advises to collect specific information on the frequency of consumption using a food propensity questionnaire (FPQ). It is further recommended that supplementary information, in particular on brand name, physical characteristics of the packaging, cooking procedures and other specific information, such as fortification, should be collected. Detailed information on the use of nutritional supplements by respondents should also be covered as well as physical measures of the survey participants (weight and height) and an estimate of their physical activity level.

In 2007, EFSA created the EGFCFCD, an EFSA network with representatives from each EU Member State. The Expert Group coordinates an effort to harmonise the collection and collation of data on food consumption and endorsed the views expressed in this Guideline.

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She is also member of the EFSA *Expert group on food consumption data* since 2007. Back to Top.  
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