

Objective measures of meal variety lacking association with consumers' perception of variety with self-selected buffet meals at work - DTU Orbit (08/11/2017)

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Food variety has been linked to higher diet quality and increased food intake, but what constitutes variety for consumers is underexposed. The aim of the study was twofold: first to explore the relationship between objective measures of meal variety and subjective post-meal ratings of perceived variety, and second to explore the associations between subjective meal variety and decision-making rules and individual eating styles. Data consist of 510 meals compiled from workplace lunch buffets by 71 respondents over 31 optional days. Meals were photographed and coded according to the number of components (dishes served), food groups, colours, size and shape of food on the plates. A mixed model approach was used to analyse data due to the repetitive structure of the data. Results show that subjective variety was marginally associated with the number of food groups, but there was no association with other objective measures, such as the number of components or any of the visual cues of the meal. Subjective meal variety was linked with the decision-making rule of having many dishes when compiling buffet lunches. Participants with higher scores on uncontrolled eating and food neophobia were found to perceive their meals less varied than those with lower scores. Moreover, the rule of having many dishes was positively associated with uncontrolled eating and negatively associated with cognitive restraint. Consumers' perception of within-meal variety seems to be more linked to their idea of how to compose their meal and individual tendencies towards food and eating rather than the objective measures applied.

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Authors: Haugaard, P. (Ekstern), Brockhoff, P. B. (Intern), Lahteenmaki, L. (Ekstern)

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