

What advice do dietitians provide about gut discomfort and how can we reassure consumers to rethink removing dairy from the diet?

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Introduction

A key health and nutrition priority for Dairy Australia is to provide credible and evidence based health information to address consumer concerns. Health professionals are a key influencer of consumer's dietary behaviours, including the management of lactose intolerance. Digestive problems can be caused by a wide range of factors, however in an attempt to alleviate symptoms, one in six Australians advice. For health professionals, such as dietitians communicating the correct advice is key, however the way in which health messages are delivered is an important consideration.

Aim

The aims were 1/ understand advice provided by dietitians to patients with reported digestive discomfort 2/ gain insight into drivers of dairy avoidance and digestive discomfort 3/ compare messaging concepts (a defensive approach (DAD) versus an empathetic approach (DAVE)) for shifting food choices.

Methods

An on-line survey of dietitians (Dietitian Connection; n=192) was undertaken. Qualitative data was gathered using focus groups (n= 28). Participants were shown dairy and digestive discomfort fact sheets; one using DAD messaging and one using DAVE messaging.

Results

In cases of digestive discomfort, 88% of dietitians would recommended reducing milk, followed by yoghurt (40%) and cheese (33%). Participants responded well to increased empathy and knowledge, while individualisation and choice made them more willing to reintroduce dairy in the diet. Focus groups identified three themes important to consumers; personal experience, choice and credibility/trust.

Conclusion

Findings illustrate a large number of dietitians recommend patients reduce dairy in the diet when digestive discomfort is suspected, contrary to scientific evidence. Overall, DAVE messaging was a more effective communication strategy when encouraging individuals to rethink eliminating dairy from the diet. The use of DAVE messaging when developing consumer resources and may help to reassure individuals they can continue to consume dairy.