

Action on fibre: working together to bridge the gap

Fiyin Makinwa explains how the food industry is helping to improve fibre intakes

Writer info



Fiyin Makinwa, an AFN registered nutritionist, is a Diet and Health Executive at the Food and Drink Federation (FDF). The FDF is the voice of the UK food and drink manufacturing industry, the largest manufacturing sector in the country. It represents and supports over 1000 members, from SMEs to large global brands.

Fibre is a key component of a healthy balanced diet and we know that dietitians love talking about it!

As you will know, in 2015, as part of the SACN carbohydrate report, the government increased the UK dietary recommendation for fibre from 24g to 30g.¹ Data from the Global Burden of Disease² is one of many sources that demonstrates how important fibre is, with it being in the top five dietary risk factors impacting non-communicable disease (NCD) mortality and morbidity for the UK.

Food and drink companies know the role they can play in helping people to improve their diets, having worked on successive government reformulation programmes, starting with the salt programme nearly 20 years ago. There are currently no government approaches to increase fibre in the food we eat, and so at the FDF we decided to work with our companies, building on the expertise and experience of salt and sugar reduction programmes, to develop a programme aimed at encouraging consumers to eat more fibre.

We know only 9% of UK adults meet the dietary recommendation³ so we initially undertook consumer polling⁴ to understand this further. We found that only one-in-three people know the recommended daily amount for adults is 30g – emphasising the need to raise awareness of the dietary recommendation. We also found that although most people were aware of the benefit to bowel health, only 25% of people knew that a diet high in fibre can reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes. Our polling showed close to one-in-ten people did not know any of the benefits of fibre, such as reduced risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and bowel cancer.⁵ Separate research undertaken by IGD found people believe that higher fibre options are bland, take more time and effort to prepare and are more expensive.⁶

So what can we do? As many reading this will know, less than 0.1% of the population is estimated to meet all recommendations in the Eatwell Guide. Supporting people to meet these recommendations would of course be helpful and move most people towards a higher fibre intake.⁷ But even this may not be enough; research shows⁸ eating five portions of fruit and vegetables and three portions of starchy foods a day would only amount to consuming around 22g of fibre. Achieving the 30g fibre recommendation can therefore be a real challenge and requires higher fibre options to be an appealing and easy choice for meals and snacks throughout the day.

We consider this is where food and drink manufacturers can play an important role by helping to ensure higher fibre diets are more appealing, normal and easy for the population. As such, in September 2021, the FDF launched Action on Fibre, an industry-led initiative to help consumers bridge

the gap between current intakes and the dietary recommendation.

Companies signed up to Action on Fibre have pledged a raft of exciting actions to help bridge the gap. Pledges include using innovation and reformulation to increase the amount of fibre in both new and existing products consumers know and love, along with using marketing and on-pack messaging to nudge consumers toward higher fibre options. Examples of the types of work are given in the two case studies provided by BDA corporate members Schar and Quorn.

Since the launch of the initiative, the FDF has continued to raise the profile of the importance of fibre and encourage more companies to commit to bridge the gap through a broad range of activities, including a podcast, a Focus on Fibre webinar, and supporting International Wholegrain Day. We were delighted to round off 2021 with 21 participating companies, including ingredient suppliers and manufacturers, covering a wide range of foodstuffs.

“One area where we believe more needs to be done is raising the importance of fibre in the diet. Companies can help raise consumer awareness but we need a broader collaboration with government, health charities and health professionals”

We are committed to building this even further throughout 2022 and look forward to analysing the impact of the pledges at the end of the year, with an annual report detailing the progress companies have made towards their pledges and the increase in fibre delivered to consumers.

One area where we believe more needs to be done is raising the importance of fibre in the diet. Companies can of course help to raise consumer awareness through on-pack labelling with an authorised fibre nutrition claim as prescribed within the retained Nutrition and Health Claims Regulation. However, we believe to really make a difference, we need a much broader collaboration, with government, health charities and health professionals like you, all talking about the benefits of a high fibre diet, including educating people about sources and what to look for on labels.

It's clearly a hot topic – in fact the BDA Food Fact sheet on fibre was in the top 10 viewed on the BDA website last year, and encouragingly this was up by more than 75% – but there is more to do.



To find out more about Action on Fibre please visit the Action on Fibre webpage at fdf.org.uk/fdf/what-we-do/diet-and-health/action-on-fibre.

For more information about the FDF and the industry we represent visit: fdf.org.uk.

Quorn's use of innovative research and launch of new high fibre product

Holly Roper ANutr, Health & Nutrition Communications Officer,
Quorn Nutrition



Quorn's long and collaborative history of innovative research goes back decades involving leading experts in health and nutritional science. Quorn has championed evidence-based science for over 35 years, partnering with leading organisations, including the British Dietetic Association, to help disseminate their research, specifically to healthcare professionals.

Quorn is currently the only commercial brand to grow mycoprotein at scale, and believes it has a responsibility to explore every attribute of its unique and sustainable fungal protein and its health benefits. Consequently, a large proportion of Quorn's research efforts focus on exploring in more detail the effects of Quorn's dietary fibre content on the health and wellbeing of its consumers. Quorn currently collaborates with and supports 17 PhD researchers, all of whose work is related to dietary fibre.

In 2021, Quorn launched Roarsomes – a vegan version of a classic children's favourite, the 'turkey dinosaur' but made with Quorn's mycoprotein. Roarsomes are not only a great source of high-quality protein, but also low in saturated fat and high in dietary fibre at 8.4g per 100g.

An average portion of Roarsomes provides approximately 25% of the daily recommended fibre intakes for children aged four-to-ten years, and slightly over 25% for 11-18-year-olds. This demonstrates how swapping popular meat products, traditionally low in fibre, for alternatives which offer a significant fibre benefit while maintaining protein intakes, can measurably impact health targets.

"Quorn collaborates with 17 PhD researchers who work in dietary fibre"

The public reception has been phenomenal to the launch, by children and adults alike, with many sharing their dinosaur landscape creations on social media. The product's branding and campaign encouraged additional vegetable consumption by nudging users to create fun plates with their veggies, e.g. broccoli 'trees'.

Roarsomes won The Grocer's product launch of the year for 2021. Quorn collaborated with Freelance RNutr Dr Emma Derbyshire on an article in the September 2021 edition of CN Magazine. The article can be found at quornnutrition.com and you can read more about Roarsomes at quorn.co.uk/products/quorn-roarsomes.

Increasing fibre in gluten-free bread

Katie Kennedy, Nutrition Service – Dietitian, Dr Schaer



Dr Schär was established as a pioneer gluten-free business in South Tyrol, Italy, over 30 years ago. The health, nutrition and wellbeing of its consumers is pivotal to their business.

This is demonstrated through the employment of company dietitians alongside the production and marketing teams in every country where Dr Schär products are offered for sale.

In the UK, Dr Schär produces specialist products for people who avoid gluten under the 'Schär' brand. Due to the restriction of gluten-containing cereal products, achieving an adequate fibre intake may be a challenge amongst such individuals. In recognition of the vital role that dietary fibre plays in supporting health and reducing the risk of disease, alongside the chasm between current population fibre intakes and the recommendation, Dr Schär was delighted to support the FDF's Action on Fibre initiative. Dr Schär's fibre pledges are all-encompassing, spanning product development, marketing and workplace health.

In summer 2021, Dr Schär undertook a recipe re-development project involving its best-selling staple bread products: Schär Wholesome White, Seeded and Vitality Loaves. Last year, 4.3 million Schär Wholesome loaves were sold in the UK, and the Schär Wholesome

seeded loaf was the second highest selling gluten-free loaf overall. As such, small improvements to the recipes of these products have the potential to greatly improve the nutritional adequacy of consumers' diets. Dr Schär company dietitians, alongside research and development colleagues, initiated an in-depth review of the recipes, raw ingredient profiles and production methods related to these products, making and testing a range of improvements.

"Company dietitians initiated an in-depth review of the recipes"

The new recipe loaves were re-launched between June-Sept 2021. The nutritional improvements included an average fibre increase of 11% across the three lines. The Wholesome Vitality loaf now contains 9.5g fibre/100g, therefore becoming Schär's highest fibre loaf ever, with two slices providing over 20% of the 30g daily fibre requirement. This increase was achieved by a variety of means, including the addition of whole millet flour and a greater variety of seeds, such as poppy and chia. The fibre content and credentials of these products are highlighted on the front-of-pack and became one of the primary features of the marketing campaign used to promote the product re-launch.

REFERENCES

- 1 SACN Carbohydrates and Health Report
- 2 UK dietary risks, Global Burden of Disease 2019
- 3 NDNS: results from years 9 to 11 (2016 to 2017 and 2018 to 2019)
- 4 FDF consumer polling on fibre
- 5 BNF – The science of fibre
- 6 IGD – Consumer Research on the awareness and understanding Fibre within the UK
- 7 Health impacts and environmental footprints of diets that meet the Eatwell Guide recommendations: analyses of multiple UK studies
- 8 Dietary fibre and the prevention of chronic disease – should health professionals be doing more to raise awareness?