SENSORY ASPECTS IN THE SURVEY STUDY DURING THE PROJECT OPTIMISED FOOD PRODUCTS FOR ELDERLY POPULATIONS IN FINLAND

Tiina Mäenpää, Tuija Pirttijärvi and Helena Kautola at HAMK University of Applied Sciences/firstname.surname@hamk.fi
Raija Tahvonen and Eila Järvenpää at MTT Agrifood Research Finland / firstname.surname@mtt.fi

INTRODUCTION: Good nutrition and overall welfare are important factors in quality of life for elderly people. In Finland the nutritional status of hospitalized elderly population has not been much studied, but at home independently living >65 years old people suffer less from malnutrition than those hospitalized(1). The improvement of the nutrition for the elderly by increasing knowledge of nutritional needs, food preferences, physical capacities and willingness are the aims of the EU-project OPTIFEL(2). This project focuses mostly on vegetable, fruit and berry products. A study on the preferable and enjoyable characteristics of food and the suitability in capability of the elderly using the pack were investigated (3). About 90 elderly >65 years old living either in home independently, home with food service or service houses/ nursing homes were interviewed on their eating preferences, capabilities and attitudes towards different food. Malnutrition was related to physiological and cognitive behavior.

METHODS: In a survey study, 89 elderly (65 to 98 years) living in different accommodations were interviewed on their eating preferences, sensory capabilities and attitudes towards different food, especially vegetables and fruits.

RESULTS: Malnutrition was related to the physiological and cognitive behaviour and varied significantly in Finland among the elderly. Also the action of care givers and the amount eaten could effect.

The disliked foods by the Finnish elderly are listed on the left and unknown foods below.

Texture of food:
Food should be well-cooked, tender, soft, and easy to eat. Tough meat and hard and large pieces cause problems with badteeth or difficulties in swallowing. Runny and broth food easily induce coughing. Energy drinks can be served, but they are not popular because of being too sweet.

The Finnish interviewees emphasize that the food for elderly should be distinguishable, and not a uniform mush. The elderly prefer simple dishes. Soups are well appreciated. Especially nursing home residents get protein supplement like cream and butter and full milk. Energy drinks can be served, but they are not popular because of being too sweet.

Starchy food is used on every meal. Potatoes with sauce is preferred to rice and pasta. Finnish elderly liked porridge, but not chicken dishes.

Very spicy foods and food with a lot of little bones or fish bones, fat food, some sausages and tough steak are not considered suitable for the elderly.

Ice cream is a special and popular treat for the elderly. 69% of the asked elderly did not know what is a smoothy.

Sensory problems among the interviewed elderly:
- Visual problems 48% (a lot) causing problems when eating only 19%.
- Wearing a denture 19%, 87% did not feel pain during eating and 72% did not have mouth pain and 65% no teeth or gum pain, 75% no throat pain, 76% no dry mouth.
- Considered their health better that other people at their age 71%.
- The elderly felt some pleasure when eating.
- Felt a reduced strength 99%, 28% had difficulties in carrying hot dishes, 77% in carrying own plate
- Difficulty in hard to cut 27% and hard to peel 27%
- Difficulties to swallow 10%.

CONCLUSIONS
*A demand of more variability and individualisation in food.
- A need to consider more the texture of the food, and its safety.
- A need to pay attension to the visibility of the food.
- A need to choose right type of raw materials for better taste.
- A demand to improve packaging of food.

References:
2) Optimised food products for elderly populations.KBBE-2012-6-ss: FP7-311754-OPTIFEL