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An investigation into the palatability of a new Plant Based Oral Nutritional Supplement among a sample of Healthcare Professionals

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In Ireland, 2% of the population follow a vegan diet and even more are choosing to reduce their intake of animal derived products due to personal preference, health, and environmental reasons⁽¹⁾. Oral nutritional supplements (ONS) are an effective treatment for malnutrition and are associated with reduced functional decline in patients⁽²⁾. However, the majority of ONS on the market are milk- or milk protein-based, making them unsuitable for those following a plant-based diet, putting them at greater risk of malnutrition. ONS palatability and choice are key factors to ensuring adherence to ONS, and achievement of nutritional requirements⁽³⁾.

The aim of this study was to investigate the palatability of a new plant based ONS among a sample of Healthcare Professionals (HCPs).

Participants were recruited at a nutrition conference. All HCPs attending the conference were eligible to take part in the study. As they entered the conference, a taste test was carried out with a sample of HCPs (n = 26) (88% dietitians). The taste test was not blinded, as participants were aware that they were tasting a plant based ONS. Participants tasted ~20 ml of the new ONS, Nutricia Fortisip Plant Based, which is the only nutritionally complete vegan ONS available in Ireland; and completed a questionnaire. A choice between mocha and mango-passionfruit flavours was offered. They were asked to rate, out of 10, the taste of the product, with 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest. One rating was given for either or both flavours, depending on what they tasted. Data was analysed using SPSS® v27 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, Illinois, USA) to calculate mean and standard deviation.

The results of the study showed that 92% (n = 24) of participants rated the taste a 5/10 or above. 8% (n = 2) of participants rated the taste 4/10 or below. Research has shown that a taste score of 6/10 is deemed positive for ONS⁽⁴⁾. The mean score for taste in this study was 6.9 (sd 1.9).

In this sample of HCPs, the majority found the new plant-based ONS to be palatable. However as this was not a blinded study, participants' preconceived ideas about plant-based products and flavours offered may have influenced their taste scores.

Given the increased prevalence of those following plant-based diets⁽¹⁾, there is an urgent need for plant-based options so some patients do not have to compromise on taste or nutritional quality to get the support they need whilst maintaining a plant-based diet. Increasing variety in nutrition support options and ensuring consistency with people's lifestyle choices may help to ensure good adherence and improve patient outcomes (2). Further research should be conducted to assess the palatability of this product in patients at nutritional risk with a preference for plant-based dairy alternatives.

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