

New Survey Reveals an Overwhelming Majority of Nutrition Professionals Do Not Use the Glycemic Index

Potatoes are not always given the credit they deserve as a high-quality carbohydrate. The glycemic index (GI), a ranking of carbohydrate in food according to how they affect blood glucose levels, can be a barrier to consumers viewing potatoes as a healthy and nutritious vegetable. A new survey fielded by *Today's Dietitian* and sponsored by Potatoes USA indicates that an overwhelming majority of nutrition professionals do not use the GI when providing dietary guidance or recommendations to their patients and clients.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was distributed via eblast by *Today's Dietitian*, the nation's only independent media brand specifically for registered dietitians and nutrition professionals, to 35,000 subscribers. 768 nutrition professionals within the United States that actively work with patients and clients completed the survey from March 25 – April 7, 2020 (There was a margin of error +/-4% at 95% confidence). Among the respondents, 97% are Registered Dietitians (RDs)/Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs) and 17% are Certified Diabetes Educator (CDE)/Certified Diabetes Care and Education Specialist (CDCES).

73% Nearly three-quarters (73%) of nutrition professionals report that they do not use the GI when counseling their patients and clients.

- Three out of five (60%) strongly agree that eliminating high-GI foods from the diet and allowing only low-GI foods can cause people to exclude perfectly healthy foods from their diet.
- Over half of respondents (57%) strongly agree that the GI of individual foods does not always predict glucose or insulin responses to a mixed meal.
- Nearly half (48%) of all respondents believe there is conflicting or misleading research on the GI of certain food items and relationships to clinical outcomes or general health.
- The overwhelming majority (83%) report that the GI is not part of the nutritional guidelines or standards to guide the food and/or meal selection of patients in their professional place of practice.

Reasons nutritional professionals say they do not use the GI with their patients and clients:

- Believe there is a lack of convincing scientific evidence and misinformation about the efficacy of using the GI to improve clinical outcomes and general health (41%).
- Believe it is too complex for patients and clients to understand (40%).
- Believe it is too complex for patients and clients to apply in their daily lives (40%).

27% Only one-fourth (27%) of nutrition professionals surveyed report using the GI when counseling their patients and clients. Among those who do use it, only 31% use it frequently.

- Among those who do use the GI with their patients or clients, they don't rule out potatoes: four out of five (82%) believe the GI of potatoes is highly variable and depends on a number of factors including processing, temperature the potato is served (e.g. cold), preparation and cooking method, and potato type.

39% Diabetes educators are more likely than all respondents (39% vs 27%) to use the GI with their patients and clients.

The main reasons diabetes educators report using GI include:

- To give patients or clients a general concept of fast- and slow-acting carbohydrates (90%).
- To teach the general concept of GI because many low-GI foods are high in fiber—I tell my patients or clients to concentrate on eating foods higher in fiber rather than worry about the GI of a food (66%).
- Only 8% use the GI because they believe there is an overwhelming body of scientific evidence supporting the effectiveness of using the GI.
- Additionally, diabetes educators are significantly more likely than registered dietitians to report currently receiving questions about the GI of foods from their patients and clients (73% vs. 38%)

27% Among the 27% of nutrition professionals whose main practice area is weight management, only 3% reported that the GI is very valuable.

- More than one-third (35%) of those specializing in weight management believe that it is not valuable at all.

69% Nutrition professionals surveyed agree that the GI leads to misinformation about the healthfulness of fruits and vegetables (69% and 37% respectively).

- With only 1 in 10 Americans meeting recommendations for fruit and vegetable intake according to the CDC, confusion around the healthfulness in the context of GI may be another barrier to adequate consumption.

86% 86% of all nutrition professionals report they do not use the glycemic load with patients and clients.

- The Glycemic Load is a ranking system for carbohydrate-rich food that measures the amount of carbohydrates in a serving of food (vs the GI which measures a standardized amount of a single food).
- Nutrition professionals who do not use the GL with their patients attribute it to three main beliefs about the GL:
 - Believe it is too complex for patients and clients to apply in their daily lives (48%).
 - Believe it is too complex for patients and clients to understand (44%).
 - Believe it is too complex to teach to patients and clients (37%).