

GCRI INTERVIEW

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What constitutes a healthy diet, based on your research, and how could your findings be incorporated into diet and nutrition plans?

A healthy diet is largely plant-based and preferably contains whole-grain products and moderate amounts of animal products, i.e. mainly lean meat and milk products, which enable people to maintain a stable body weight.

What is your opinion on vegan diets?

A good vegan diet requires a broad and prudent selection of plant-based foods to provide an adequate nutrient supply. However, some nutrients such as vitamin B12 remain critical, particularly under certain conditions like pregnancy, and should be supplemented.

What would you like to focus on next in your research?

We are interested in improving the health value of popular convenience foods by reducing fat, sugar, and salt content while also increasing fiber content without losing sensory qualities. Another more basic research focus is to better understand an individual's response to diets as a whole and to specific dietary components – with the perspective of developing better tailored dietary recommendations aimed at more precisely preventing diet-related chronic diseases in subjects at risk.

What is the current state of Germany's research landscape with respect to nutritional science?

Some progress has been made in nutritional science in Germany over the past decade, including the establishment of several competitive centers for biomedical research and epidemiology/public health. However, compared to other fields and in relation to the considerable role diet plays in the development of chronic diseases, there is still substantial inequality and underfunding. Currently, the federal government is funding four regional "competence clusters of nutrition research" that cover a wide spectrum of disciplines. This reflects the need for a broader systemic approach to current challenges. The four regions include Potsdam/Berlin, Bonn, Jena/Halle/Leipzig and, finally, Freising/Munich/Nuremberg.