
A healthy diet helps the environment

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The New Nordic Diet is better for the environment than the food that Danes normally eat.

More fruit, vegetables and whole grains, less meat, more locally-grown produce, more seasonal raw materials, more natural foods, more seafood and more ecology.

Eat this and you'll be following the principles of the New Nordic Diet – and you'll also be doing the environment a great favour.

“The New Nordic Diet contains a great potential for reducing the negative effects that our eating habits have on the environment,” says Henrik Saxe, an associate professor who specialises in sustainability at Copenhagen University's OPUS Centre.

“Our findings show that the emission of greenhouse gases is at least 6 percent lower with the New Nordic Diet. And there's a potential for a 27-percent reduction in these emissions, compared to the average Dane's diet.”

The results, published in the online version of the scientific journal *Climatic Change*, were obtained by comparing the potential emissions of greenhouse gases from the two types of diets.

The environmental effects of food

The study points to three main aspects of the New Nordic Diet that influence the environmental effect of the food:

1. The combination of the food – for instance whether you eat lots of meat or lots of vegetables.
2. Whether the food is grown and produced locally.
3. The ecological products.

Saxe points out that it's the combination of the food and the local raw materials that has the most significant effect on whether or not one's eating habits are good for the environment. The choice between ecological or conventional foods has a less certain impact.

“If we are to adopt climate-friendly eating habits, most of us will need to cut down on our meat consumption,” he says.

“It also benefits the environmental to eat locally produced goods and replace some of the beef with lamb, chicken or pork – or to eat more vegetable protein foods such as beans and other leguminous fruits.”

Great potential

The study also shows that the New Nordic Diet has the potential to reduce the negative effects that food has on the climate by as much as 27 percent.

This could for instance be achieved by cutting down even more on our consumption of red meats – though without reducing the total intake of meat.

This would also require us to go for organic foods only if the production causes fewer greenhouse gas emissions than the conventional production of the corresponding foods.

Even further environmental benefits could be achieved if we cut down on our consumption of coffee, wine, candy and other sweets.

New findings are crucial for future food policy

Professor Arne Astrup, the centre director at OPUS, highlights the importance of these analyses in our efforts to understand the climatic consequences of our eating habits:

“This enables us to convert individual food choices into societal, environmentally-related costs,” he says.

“And it provides us with crucial information for the drafting of future food policies. According to the United Nations, as early as in 2050 we’ll need to produce food for 9.3 billion people, while continuing our efforts to slow down the effects of climate change.

Scientists at the [OPUS Centre](#) [9] will continue their research into how the New Nordic Diet affects a number of other key environmental issues such as the effect our eating habits have on the environment’s toxicity for humans and nature through particle pollution, ozone depletion, biodiversity and acidification.

 [It doesn't need to be as fancy as this dish from Copenhagen's finest restaurant, Noma, but by sticking to the principles of the New Nordic Diet, you can do your part to help the environment. \(Photo: Wikimedia commons, ?Multichill?\)](#) [10]
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Fact box

The OPUS research project - 'Optimal well-being, development and health for Danish children through a healthy New Nordic Diet' - runs from 2009 until 2013.

Its main objective is to establish a multi-disciplinary research centre to develop a healthy and palatable new food and eating concept 'The New Nordic Diet', and to examine how such a diet can affect mental and physical health.

The emission of greenhouse gases is at least 6 percent lower with the New Nordic Diet. And there’s a potential for a 27-percent reduction in these emissions, compared to the average Dane’s diet.
Henrik Saxe

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[The global warming potential of two healthy Nordic diets compared with the average Danish diet, Climatic Change, DOI: 10.1007/s10584-012-0495-4](#) [17]

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