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## STUDY

Food frequency questionnaire

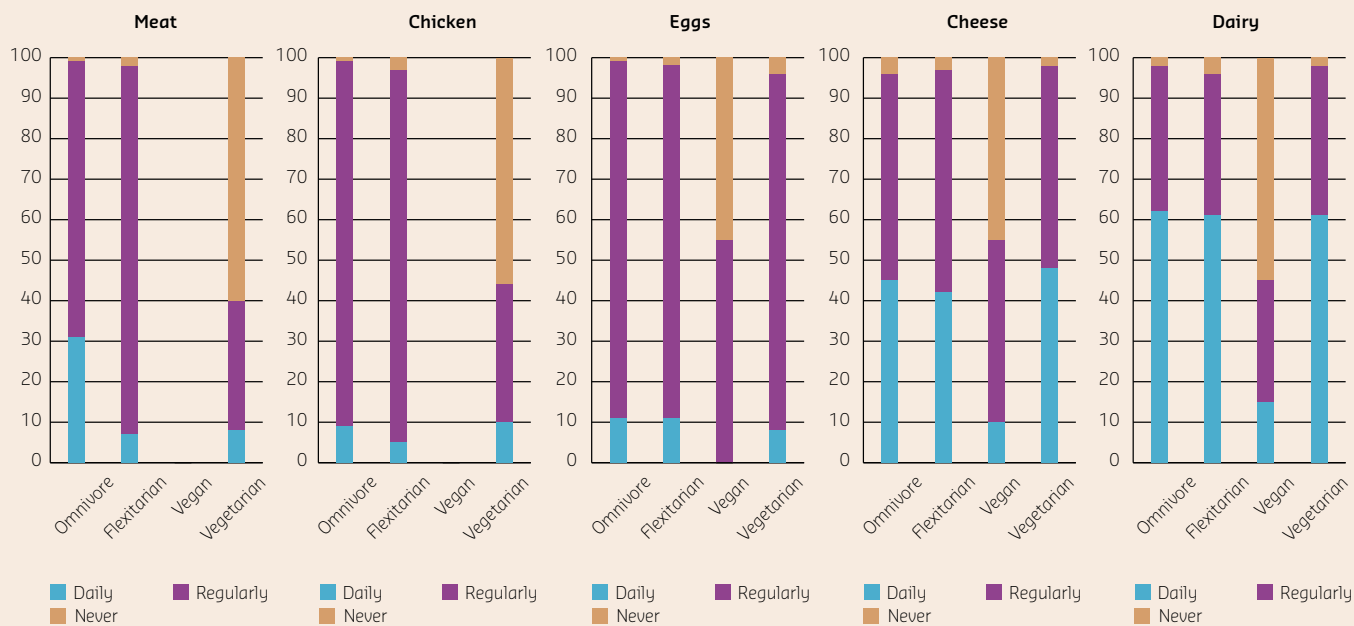
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# Many vegetarians and vegans do eat animal products

*What we eat is sociocultural and part of our identity. But what someone says they eat is not always the same as what they actually eat. GfK research shows that 40% of vegetarians regularly eat meat and over 50% of vegans eat dairy and eggs.*

AUTHORS JOHAN SCHILDKAMP, JOLANDE VALKENBURG, DR. STEPHAN PETERS (DUTCH DAIRY ASSOCIATION)





**Figure 1**  
Food frequency of animal products, classified by dietarian identity (n=1619, GfK panel, Dairy Barometer, May 2022)

**D**ietary choices and eating behaviors stem from habits. We take on certain eating habits through how we are brought up. The country and culture in which we are born also determine our habits. People can also distinguish themselves from others and belong to a certain group through their dietary choices. Three different dietarian identities are commonly recognized: a person can identify as an omnivore, vegetarian or vegan. A new dietarian identity has also arisen in recent years: the flexitarian. According to the Netherlands Nutrition Centre, flexitarians eat no meat between meals or at meals (but do eat fish) three or more days a week.

### GfK study

Whether someone's dietarian identity actually matches their dietary habits is a question GfK researched among a group of 1629 consumers. The study was conducted in May 2022. Participants were first asked which products they had eaten and how often. Afterwards they were asked which dietarian identity they classified themselves as. Based on their self-reported dietarian identity, the respondents (n=1629) could be classified

into the following groups:

- 74% omnivore
- 20% flexitarian
- 3% vegetarian
- 1% vegan
- 2% other

Each participant received a food frequency questionnaire with questions about their consumption of animal products and some plant-based imitations to avoid confusion about the origin of animal based products. Figure 1 shows the results of the completed questionnaires for the main animal products: meat (total), chicken, eggs, cheese and dairy (total).

### Meat consumption

The survey uncovered some striking results about meat consumption. Flexitarians were indeed found to eat less meat than omnivores and are also more likely to choose organic products, additional questions revealed. It seems that consumers who classify themselves as flexitarians are more conscious about food. Interestingly, over 40% of vegetarians in the food frequency questionnaire indicated that they eat meat daily or regularly. The questionnaire showed that vegans actually do not eat meat.

### Dairy consumption

Consumption of dairy (overall) and cheese appears to correspond to dietarian identity among omnivores, flexitarians and vegetarians. Subanalyses show that flexitarians and vegetarians are more likely to consume organic dairy products. Interestingly, the food frequency questionnaire revealed that more than half of vegans consume cheese or dairy products daily or regularly, despite the fact that vegan means you do not eat animal products and therefore no dairy or eggs. Of vegans in the survey, 9% indicated that they eat a cheese sandwich daily and 27% said they do so regularly. More than 50% of vegans indicated that they eat eggs regularly.

### Conclusion

People who call themselves flexitarians are omnivores who eat more consciously and choose organic products more often. The survey shows that a large proportion of consumers who call themselves vegetarians sometimes eat meat and are actually flexitarians. The GfK survey also shows that half of vegans do eat dairy and eggs and are therefore more accurately labeled vegetarians. <