

# EPIC-NORFOLK NEWS

2024

Welcome to the Autumn 2024 EPIC-Norfolk participant newsletter.

As one of the 30,445 participants in the EPIC Norfolk research, you have contributed your data to one of the largest population studies worldwide, with over half a million participants recruited across ten European countries. Collectively you have completed numerous food diaries and questionnaires, attended health check visits, and provided blood samples, which are used for current and future research. Data collection began in 1993 and continued with four additional health checks. This information gathered over time makes this research particularly valuable.

Your data is still vitally important to research today, allowing researchers to examine the differences between people who become ill and those who remain healthy. We continue to monitor the health of participants through ongoing 'record linkage' to general and hospital medical records and disease registries. We collect mental health information held and maintained by NHS England, which we use to study dementia, and data from the National Diabetes Audit. Linkage to medical records is a particularly important part of medical research and of informing future health policies. The EPIC Norfolk study is coordinated by a management team based at the University of



Cambridge and led by Professor Nick Wareham. If you have any questions about the EPIC-Norfolk study's data linkage, or about the safeguarding of your information, please contact the study team at [epic-norfolk@mrc-epid.cam.ac.uk](mailto:epic-norfolk@mrc-epid.cam.ac.uk)

## UK Longitudinal Linkage Collaboration update

The EPIC-Norfolk study is a partner in the UK Longitudinal Linkage Collaboration (UK LLC), which was created in 2020 to help researchers answer priority research questions about COVID-19 set by the UK government to better understand the impacts of the pandemic and develop new treatments. UK LLC provides researchers with a Trusted Research Environment (TRE) where de-identified data from linked studies can be analysed under strict safeguards and with all data staying within the TRE.



UK LLC has received further funding from UK Research and Innovation, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Medical Research Council, and is now preparing to make data more widely available to researchers to perform their analysis within its TRE for purposes other than COVID-19 research. By doing this, the UK LLC aims to enhance researchers' ability to address diverse and important issues that affect people's health and wellbeing.

If you have any questions about the EPIC-Norfolk study participation in the UK LLC, please visit [www.epic-norfolk.org.uk/for-participants/uk-llc/](http://www.epic-norfolk.org.uk/for-participants/uk-llc/), or contact the study team if you would like to discuss the use of your data in this collaboration

# Can a planet-friendly diet lower type 2 diabetes risk? Findings from EPIC-Norfolk

Climate change and chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes are two of the biggest global health challenges today, and diet plays a key role in both. Unhealthy diets characterised by low consumption of fruits, vegetables, and plant-based foods, and which include large proportions of animal-based foods such as red meat, are linked to a higher risk of type 2 diabetes and contribute to climate change.

Research shows that current food systems, which supports our current dietary pattern, use 40% of the world's land, produce about 30% of greenhouse gases, and consume 70% of global freshwater. In 2019, to address these issues, the EAT-Lancet Commission proposed the "planetary health diet", a way of eating that supports both human and environmental health.

## What is a planetary health diet?

The planetary health diet is based mostly on plant foods like fruits, vegetables and whole grains, plant proteins such as beans, lentils and nuts, and healthy plant oils. It includes smaller portions of meat and dairy, along with limited added sugars and starchy vegetables.

The goal is a diet that is optimised to promote health and reduce environmental harm.

## Key findings from the EPIC-Norfolk Study

We studied how following the planetary health diet affects type 2 diabetes risk. Using data from the EPIC-Norfolk Study, we found that people who closely followed this diet had a 32% lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes compared to those who did not.

Our findings indicate that following the dietary recommendations of the planetary health diet may help lower type 2 diabetes risk. Further research, particularly in non-European populations, is needed to confirm these findings.

Following the planetary health diet may also help protect the environment by reducing damage related to food production, but this wasn't something we could explore in the EPIC-Norfolk Study. Modelling studies have suggested it can help protect the environment, but additional real-world studies, especially in countries outside Europe, could help confirm these benefits.

The research team acknowledged the contribution of participants of the EPIC-Norfolk Study and the support of the Medical Research Council.

Dr Solomon Sowah, a researcher with the MRC Epidemiology Unit's Nutritional Epidemiology programme, said:

"I would like to sincerely thank all participants of the EPIC-Norfolk study. Your willingness to attend health checks, provide samples, and complete questionnaires and food diaries has been instrumental in enabling our research. Your invaluable contributions are at the heart of our efforts to advance scientific knowledge and improve health outcomes. We are truly grateful for your support."







EPIC-Norfolk 30th Anniversary Public Meeting in September 2023

## EPIC-Norfolk 30th Anniversary Public Event

To celebrate the fantastic achievements of the EPIC-Norfolk study from 1993 to 2023, we held a celebratory event in Norwich to mark the 30th anniversary of the start of the study. This was attended in-person and via a live webinar by nearly 500 EPIC-Norfolk participants. The seminar ran twice to accommodate all those who were interested in attending.

At the event, participants first had an opportunity to talk with PhD students and postdoctoral researchers who presented posters describing research they had conducted using EPIC-Norfolk data, and this was followed by a series of short presentations, starting with the history of EPIC-Norfolk by Professor Kay-Tee Khaw, one of the founders of the study. They also heard from Steve Knighton and Soren Brage about how we carefully look after and use your samples and data, and from Nita Forouhi about how recent technological developments are enabling cutting edge and impactful science. There was then an entertaining panel discussion, which included the former Chair of the EPIC-Norfolk Participant Advisory Panel, Peter Gibley, and an open question and answer session with the audience.

Our gratitude to the participants for their many years of engagement with the study was the prevailing theme.

Watch a recording of the event at <https://www.epic-norfolk.org.uk/news/public-events/>

## EPIC-Norfolk Participant Panel

The EPIC-Norfolk Participant Advisor Panel continues to guide the research team, providing a participant perspective on all aspects of the EPIC-Norfolk Study. EPAP was led for many years by Peter Gibley, who announced last year that he was stepping down from his chair duties. We would like to thank Peter for his invaluable guidance and leadership of the panel. His quick wit, energy, charisma, and positivity will be sorely missed.

We are very pleased to announce that John Flowerdew took over as chair of EPAP meetings from January 2024.

If you are interested in joining EPAP or would like further information about the group, please contact Nicola Kimber (EPIC-Norfolk Study Coordinator).

- Email: [EPIC-Norfolk@mrc-epid.cam.ac.uk](mailto:EPIC-Norfolk@mrc-epid.cam.ac.uk)
- Tel: 0800 616 911



# Digitising paper questionnaires

EPIC-Norfolk has a longstanding commitment to reducing its carbon footprint, modernising protocols, and ensuring wise expenditure. As part of these efforts, an increasing number of questionnaires have been digitised and entered into our secure computer database for essential scientific research. This involves scanning in the documents to be stored in an electronic format.

We therefore took the decision to dispose of the physical paper copies once they had been digitised.

In March 2024, the EPIC-Norfolk team visited the secure storage facility in Suffolk to remove food diaries that had been digitised and were no longer needed in paper form. Over the course of the day, we disposed of approximately 250 boxes, reducing both the monetary and environmental costs associated with their storage.

As part of our ongoing efforts to minimize paper waste, don't forget that there is an option to receive your newsletter in a paperless format.

If you wish to switch to a digital version, please visit the EPIC-Norfolk website at <https://www.epic-norfolk.org.uk/details/> and use the online form to update your preferences.



## Future newsletters

### Prefer email?

We provide the EPIC-Norfolk newsletters by email, with a printed version for those who are not able to receive emails. Please let us know:

- your email address if you are happy to receive future newsletters by email rather than through the post
- whether we have the correct postal address for you.

You can provide this information via a secure form at [www.epic-norfolk.org.uk/details](https://www.epic-norfolk.org.uk/details) or by contacting us using the following methods.

### How to contact us

Tel: +44 (0)800 616 911

Email: [epic-norfolk@mrc-epid.cam.ac.uk](mailto:epic-norfolk@mrc-epid.cam.ac.uk)

Write to us at:

EPIC-Norfolk Study

MRC Epidemiology Unit

University of Cambridge School of Clinical Medicine

Box 285 Institute of Metabolic Science

## How we use your information

You will find a copy of the EPIC-Norfolk privacy notice at [www.epic-norfolk.org.uk/for-participants/privacy-statement](https://www.epic-norfolk.org.uk/for-participants/privacy-statement). If you wish to receive a printed copy of this statement, please contact the study team using the information above.

Likewise, if you no longer wish to receive these newsletter updates, please contact the study team. This will not prevent you from receiving any direct communication about your participation in the study.

[epic-norfolk@mrc-epid.cam.ac.uk](mailto:epic-norfolk@mrc-epid.cam.ac.uk)

0800 616911