'On certain occasions like a barbecue, people just do expect to eat meat'
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Many factors in picking vegetarian options

A different protein source instead of that piece of meat? There are many different motives involved in such a decision, discovered researchers at Human Nutrition and Health.

The flavour of meat substitutes is not the key reason why people choose a vegetarian dish. Equally important are environmental and health knowledge, the price, willingness to try new dishes, the setting and the way the food is prepared. Moreover, women are more likely to select an alternative protein source than men. Wageningen scientists reported these findings in the scientific journal *Nutrients* last month. Although these motives were fairly predictable, there were surprises

'We thought health was a much bigger incentive'

for the researchers. 'We had expected health to be a much bigger incentive,' says Marianne Geleijnse, professor of Nutrition and Cardiovascular Diseases. 'The study shows that there are many factors involved. So transitioning from meat to alternative sources of protein is not that simple.'

Although the flavour and texture of meat substitutes are important to people, the meal as a whole is a more decisive factor in choosing between meat or a vegetarian alternative. 'So it's also about how you cook and serve the food,' says Geleijnse. The context plays a role in the choice too: something scientists call situational appropriateness. 'People just do expect to eat meat on certain occasions,' Geleijnse explains. 'At a barbecue, for instance, or when the family have Sunday lunch together.' In their study, the scientists provide a list of incentives to choose meat substitutes. 'Our research is like a giant puzzle with some pieces missing,' Geleijnse states. There is little information about factors such as religion and animal welfare, while much more research has been done on other factors such as packaging. The Wageningen scientists hope their peers will conduct more targeted research to find the missing pieces of the puzzle. NVTWH