

The student diet: beer, bread, bananas, peanut butter and pizza

Last year saw the launch of the Wageningen Student Cohort study. A cohort study is a research method in which data is collected regularly over a longer period among a relatively large group of test subjects. Nutrition lecturer De Roos started the study because she was curious about the mental and physical development of the current generation of first-year students.

'And because I wanted to create a project for thesis students. One of them discovered, for example, that the participants in our cohort got most of their iron – needed for the haemoglobin that binds oxygen in red blood cells and muscles – in the form of non-haem iron, which is not found in meat. I thought that was a result we should make known at the society level: people are scared of going short of iron if they

don't eat meat, but it clearly doesn't have to result in an iron deficiency.'

Blood loss

The study revealed that about half the girls involved suffer serious blood loss during their menstruation. De Roos:



'That is a risk factor for iron deficiency. When we discovered that, we contacted biology lecturer Anneke Valk, who is known for her menstruation workshops. We will see what we can do about this in the future.'

And the diet diaries provided an interesting peek into what first-years eat. De Roos: 'Mainly bread, bananas, pizza, peanut butter and beer. A typical student diet.'

In the first year of the project about 90 students took part. De Roos: 'Only when we have about 200 students can we divide them into subgroups and submit those to statistical analysis. We are now recruiting the next hundred, but these data are already providing interesting insights.' DV