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Research explores reasons for patients' medical nutrition struggles

The nutrition leader studied data based on 12,000 patients with serious illnesses in 12 different countries

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Analysis by Arla Foods Ingredients has provided new insights into the reasons so many patients struggle to complete a medical nutrition plan.

The nutrition leader studied data based on 12,000 patients with serious illnesses in 12 different countries. Seven in ten were recommended medical nutrition plans but three in ten of these did not manage to complete them. The most common reasons for the non-completion of plans were price, struggles ingesting or digesting products, and bodily intolerance.

To provide a deeper understanding and to listen to the voices of patients, Arla Foods Ingredients also commissioned new qualitative research. It focused on the experiences of 40 people with cancer, sarcopenia, or gut-related illnesses, all of whom were following, or had followed a medical nutrition plan.

One of the areas it explored was the taste and texture of products – an aspect of the medical nutrition experience that commonly plays a role in daily non-compliance.

Initial reactions to the taste of products were often negative but tended to become more positive over time. However, texture challenges appeared harder to overcome. Many of the participants found that medical drinks had an unpleasant consistency, with comments including “the thickness is difficult and sometimes makes you gag” and “[it] can almost be nauseating to drink.”

Helle Nyby Klinge, Sales Development Manager at Arla Foods Ingredients, said: “Medical nutrition is a vital aspect of recovery from illness, so it’s worrying that so many patients are either not recommended a plan in the first place, or don’t complete it. With this research, we wanted to look at the big picture, but also to listen to the voices of individual patients. It’s clear that they are doing their best to comply, but face a range of challenges – not just the price of products, but also basic issues like taste and texture. The good news is that these can often be overcome by medical nutrition manufacturers, giving patients a better experience and helping them increase their chances of faster recovery.”

The findings will be discussed in Arla Foods Ingredients’ first-ever medical nutrition webinar on 6th June. Experts taking part will include Randi Tobberup, Ph. D, MSc, RD Head of Clinical Dietitians at the Center for Nutrition and Bowel Failure at Aalborg University in Denmark.

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