

Research on Plant-Based Nutrition - Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About the COPLANT Study

BfR FAQ, 11 March 2022

COPLANT means **CO**hort on **PLANT**-based diet and is up to this date the largest planned cohort study on plant-based nutrition in all German-speaking countries. From the end of 2022, the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR), together with the Max Rubner Institute (MRI), the Research Institute for Plant-Based Nutrition (IFPE), and five university partners - Christian Albrechts University in Kiel, Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Rheinische Friedrich Wilhelms University Bonn, Ruprecht Karl University Heidelberg, University of Regensburg - will recruit around 6,000 women and men aged 18-69 for the study across Germany. The BfR has summarised the most important questions concerning the COPLANT Study.

What is COPLANT?

COPLANT stands for **CO**hort Study on **PLANT**-based Diets. With around 6,000 participants, COPLANT is the largest planned cohort study on plant-based nutrition in all German speaking countries up to this date. People who eat a vegan (no animal products), vegetarian (no meat and fish but dairy and eggs), pescetarian (no meat but fish) or omnivorous (both plant and animal products) diets will be compared with each other. Being currently at the planning stage the study intends to provide impetus for the review of existing nutritional recommendations and the development of new ones. As of reaching this goal, the study will provide answers on the following questions: Which vitamins and minerals are adequately absorbed (and which are not)? Do heavy metals, mould toxins or other contaminants enter the body through the respective diet? What happens in the metabolism when we give up food of animal origin? How sustainable are the diets under consideration?

Why COPLANT?

Especially in young people, vegan and vegetarian diets tend to gain high interest, not only in the aspect of being more sustainable. Nevertheless, there is currently little scientifically reliable data on vegan and vegetarian nutrition. Older studies on plant-based nutrition are barely comparable with today's forms of dietary habits. For example, the range of vegan foods and meat substitutes, some of which are highly processed and high in sugar, fat and salt, is increasing. The current larger epidemiological projects in Germany include almost no vegans. In addition the currently used nutritional survey instruments are not suitable for plant-based diets. And also internationally limited data on vegan diets is available up to this date. Using actual data to classify plant-based diets as healthy or not in terms of risk prevention and early detection of illnesses is hardly possible. Sustainability effects of diets are only available in very limited facets, but not in the overall view of all relevant dimensions like health, environment, society and economy. COPLANT aims to change this, by supplying missing data and thus enabling evidence-based recommendations on a plant-based and sustainable nutrition.

What is the aim of the COPLANT study?

The aim of the COPLANT study is to investigate the connections between plant-based diets and health status including various effects of social relevance. This will provide a basis to give recommendations for a healthy and sustainable lifestyle.

www.bfr.bund.de

What is actually evaluated?

In COPLANT we use the following methods to determine our data:

Nutrition survey using an app (weighing protocol for at least three days) and surveys on various topics

- Determination of body composition via bioelectrical impedance analysis (BIA)
- Measurement of height, bodyweight and waist circumference
- Determination of bone density and health using ultrasound (broadband ultrasound attenuation, BUA for short)
- Blood pressure
- Physical activity
- Manual strength
- The basic laboratory programme at least once (blood analysis when fasting, 24-hour urine collection, stool sample)

Note: You should plan total of around three hours for the examinations and interviews at the study centre.

How many study centres are there? Where are the study centres located?

There are eight study centres in total:

1. The Federal Institute for Risk Assessment, Berlin
2. Christian-Albrechts-University, Kiel
3. Research Institute for Plant-Based Nutrition, Giessen
4. Friedrich-Schiller University, Jena
5. Max Rubner Institute, Karlsruhe
6. University of Bonn
7. Ruprecht-Karl University, Heidelberg
8. University of Regensburg

Who can take part in COPLANT?

Women and men aged between 18 and 69 at the time of recruitment who have been following one of the following diets for at least one year:

- Vegan: no animal products
- Vegetarian: no meat and fish, but dairy products and eggs
- Pescetarian: no meat, but fish
- Omnivore: both plant and animal products (mixed food)

Pregnant and breastfeeding women are also cordially invited to take part in the study.

In addition, the following criteria must be fulfilled

- Health insurance must be available

Why should I participate?

Each individual participant is important to the success of the study. The more people participate, the more meaningful the results are. You can therefore make an important contribution to research in the field of plant-based nutrition. If desired, the results of selected examinations and blood values will be made available to you in writing and in a comprehensible manner after the examination. In this way you can receive valuable information about the status of your health. For example, by measuring hand grip strength: How strong are your hands?

www.bfr.bund.de

Hand strength provides information about the state of muscle strength and physical performance. By examining body composition, you can find out what your muscle or fat percentage is, while ultrasound on your heel provides you with information about your bone health. We also do a complete blood count and measure blood sugar and blood lipids.

Will I receive money for my participation?

The study is funded from public funds, so we cannot pay a fee for participation. We appreciate your commitment and offer you an expense allowance. In addition, you may keep the kitchen scale used for keeping the nutrition logs.

Who is funding the study?

The study is financed from public funds and contributions from the study centres of the respective institution. The Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) endorses the study concept and supports the coordination of the study, including data management and quality assurance, as well as the central storage of biological samples.

How does the COPLANT Study ensure data protection?

Your data is subject to data protection in all phases of the study and will be treated confidentially. In the study, your personal data (name and address) are stored separately from the data collected during the surveys and investigations. The data collected during the surveys and investigations are not saved together with names and addresses, but are encoded with a number (so-called pseudonymisation). Only selected employees of the respective study centre have access to the personal data. The scientific analyses are carried out exclusively with the pseudonymised data.

More information about the COPLANT Study is available on the BfR website

<https://www.bfr.bund.de/en/coplant-study.html>



BfR "Statements app"

About the BfR

The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) is a scientifically independent institution within the portfolio of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) in Germany. It advises the Federal Government and the federal states ("Länder") on questions of food, chemical and product safety. The BfR conducts independent research on topics that are closely linked to its assessment tasks.