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**Title: Public Attitudes to Food  
Issues – Further analysis on  
those aged 65 and over**

**Client**



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## 1 Summary

This mini report outlines some findings from the Public Attitudes to Food Issues Survey specifically for the over 65s subgroup. Questions examined are those that could relate to increasing the risk of food poisoning at home, particularly Listeria, cases of which have been increasing in older people in recent years. Topics explored include response to increasing food prices and food hygiene practices.

Overall, four out of five respondents aged 65+ (78%) reported that their food bills had increased over the last 12 months as a result of increases to food prices. The proportion of respondents aged 65+ who felt their food bills had increased over the past 12 months is similar to those aged 25-64 but significantly higher than those aged 16-24 (59%).

While over three quarters of respondents aged 65+ felt their food bills had increased just fewer than three in five respondents aged 65+ (58%) said that they had made at least one change to try and reduce their food bills. This is lower than the proportion of people in all other age bands who have made a change (67% of 16-24's, 80% of 25-44's, 71% of 45-64's).

The most popular changes that people aged 65+ have made as a result of increases to food prices are buying food products on offer (22%) and buying fewer luxury items (21%). These are the most popular changes made across all age groups, however, they are mentioned by a significantly fewer proportion of the over 65s than by those aged under 65.

Only two fifths of respondents (42%) aged 65+ correctly identified the use by date as the best indicator of whether food is safe to eat or not. This was a significantly lower percentage than in people aged 25-44 (51%) and 45-64 (53%).

Across all of the different food types respondents aged 65+ were less likely than younger respondents to say that they would never eat food which is past its use by date or best before date (Chart 3). This is of concern as a significant proportion of the population aged 65+ are prepared to eat food which is past its use by date, a risk factor for food poisoning.

A third of respondents aged 65+ said they would cook and eat raw meat that was up to 3 days past its use by date (33%) and a similar proportion (34%) would eat cooked meat which was up to 3 days past its use by date. Two fifths of over 65s (40%) would eat dairy up to three days past its use by date and over half of over 65s (52%) would eat eggs past their best before end dates.

Respondents aged 65+ were less concerned about the dates for bread and breakfast cereals. Only one in five said they would never eat bread (21%) or breakfast cereal (19%) which is past its best before end date (BBE). People from Scotland were more likely than people from England to state they would never eat bread or breakfast cereals past their BBE dates (Table 7).

Only two in five respondents (39%) aged 65+ checked their fridge temperature at least every 6 months. This is in line with those aged 25-44 and those aged 45-64 (both 43%) and significantly greater than those aged 16-24 (29%). Respondents aged 65-74 (43%) were more likely to check their fridge temperature than respondents aged 75+ (35%) but due to the small sample sizes these differences are not significant.

A quarter of respondents aged 65-74 (25%) said that food hygiene was important to them when deciding what to buy to eat at home. This is significantly higher than those aged 75+ where only 17%



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considered food hygiene important in their decision making. Food hygiene was most important to people aged 45-64 (31%).

Just over a third of respondents aged 65-74 (35%) said that food hygiene was important to them in deciding what to buy to eat outside of the home. This is significantly higher proportion than people aged 75+ where only a quarter (26%) considered food hygiene to be important.

Respondents aged 65+ in the higher social groups (ABC1) were significantly more likely to state that food hygiene was a consideration when deciding what to buy to eat outside of the home compared to people in the lower (C2DE) social classes (36% compared 26%).



## 2 Introduction

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) commissioned GfK NOP to conduct a stand alone survey of public attitudes towards food issues. This survey will form part of a package of work on public attitudes which also includes the Quarterly Public Attitudes Tracker.

The main aims of the research were:

- to establish the extent that particular attitudes towards food issues are held by the public
- to understand whether views are dependent on particular characteristics
- to understand whether views differ across the countries of the UK

In total, 3219 face to face interviews were carried out with members of the general public in their homes between 9 October and 5 November 2008. 1959 interviews were completed as part of a Random Location Omnibus (RLO) survey with a UK-representative sample and 1260 interviews were completed as part of a separate but methodologically identical booster survey in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In total 636 people aged 65 and over were interviewed as part of this study. Data were weighted at the analysis stage to ensure the sample profile was representative of the UK population.

This report looks at the findings from the Public Attitudes to Food Issues survey relevant to these issues for people aged 65 and over, and how their behaviours and attitudes differ from younger people. This should be read in conjunction with the main report (Public Attitudes to Food Issues) and technical report.

Please note that the sample size for the over 65 group is relatively small (n=636) and therefore it is not always possible to conduct meaningful analysis of subgroups within this age bracket. The questions relating to how people use date labels were asked of a subset of the sample and the sample sizes are too small for any sub group analysis.

Table 1 below shows the proportion of over 65s sampled in each country.

| <b>Table 1. Proportion of over 65s in each country</b> |            |        |          |        |
|--|------------|--------|----------|--------|
|  | Unweighted |        | Weighted |        |
|  | n          | %      | n        | %      |
| OVERALL  | 717        | 100%   | 636      | 100%   |
| England  | 371        | 51.74% | 531      | 83.49% |
| Scotland   | 122        | 17.02% | 54       | 8.49%  |
| Wales  | 128        | 17.85% | 34       | 5.35%  |
| Northern Ireland                                       | 96         | 13.39% | 16       | 2.52%  |
| <b>Base All aged 65+ (636)</b>                         |            |        |          |        |

## 2.1 Over 65s and food issues

*Listeria monocytogenes* (commonly known as *Listeria*) is a bacteria which can be found in food and, in the right proportions, can cause severe and sometimes life threatening food borne illnesses. *Listeria* is the number one food poisoning killer. Groups of people who are particularly at risk from *Listeria* include pregnant women and people with weakened immunity and those aged over 60.

*Listeria* has been found in a range of chilled ready to eat foods such as pre-packed sandwiches, pate, butter, soft mould-ripened cheeses, cooked sliced meats and smoked salmon. It is impossible to tell from its appearance whether food is contaminated with *Listeria*. It will look, smell and taste completely normal.

The number of *Listeria* cases has increased dramatically over recent years and particularly for people aged 65 and over. The Food Standards Agency has explored a number of different hypotheses for why there has been such a dramatic increase for people aged 65+, and as part of this process they are investigating whether people are not following the recommended guidelines for avoiding *Listeria* in the home.

They are:

### Minimising the risk

- *Listeria* can grow at refrigeration temperatures, so chilled foods must be kept cold and eaten by their 'use by' dates.

### Keep chilled ready-to-eat food cold

- make sure the fridge is set at 5 °C or below and working correctly
- foods taken out of chilled storage should be eaten within four hours – after that you should throw the food away

### Storage – follow instructions on the label

- don't use food after its 'use by' date – make sure you check the label before serving
- use opened foods within two days, unless the manufacturer's instructions state otherwise

### 3 Food prices

The survey explored whether people had made any changes to their shopping and eating habits in response to increasing food prices. One possible concern is that people may be changing their shopping habits in a way which could contribute to food not being stored and consumed appropriately (e.g. buying too much due to special offers etc). This section explores whether this could be the case for those aged over 65 and how this differs to younger respondents.

Overall, four out of five respondents aged 65+ (78%) reported that their food bills had increased over the last 12 months as a result of increases to food prices. The proportion of respondents aged 65+ who felt their food bills had increased over the past 12 months is similar to those aged 25-64 but significantly higher than those aged 16-24 (Table 2)<sup>1</sup>.

| <b>Table 2. Q.A6 Proportion of respondents who felt their food bills had increased as a result of increases to food prices</b> |     |
|--|-----|
| 16-24  | 59% |
| 25-44  | 77% |
| 45-64  | 76% |
| 16-64 (summary)  | 72% |
| 65+  | 78% |
| <b>Base All (3219)</b>   |     |

All respondents were shown a list and asked if they had made any changes to their shopping behaviour as a result of increases to food prices. While those aged 65+ were the most likely to state that their food bills had increased they were the least likely to have made any changes to the food that they buy as a result. Just fewer than three in five respondents aged 65+ (58%) said that they had made at least one change to try and reduce their food bills. This was significantly lower than for people aged 16-64 where three quarters (75%) had made at least one change. Respondents aged 25-44 were the most likely to state they had made a change to their shopping habits (Table 3).

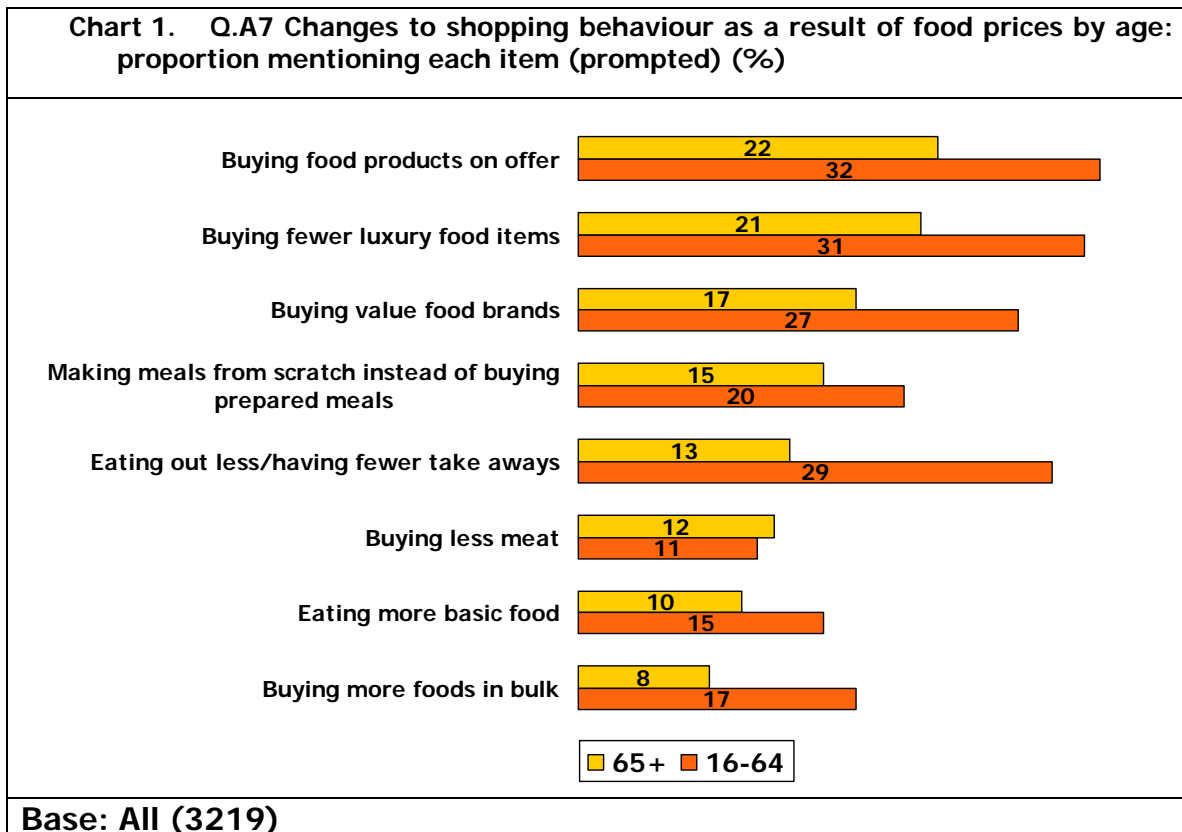
| <b>Table 3. Q.A7 Proportion of respondents who have made a change to their shopping habits as a result of increases to food prices</b> |     |
|--|-----|
| 16-24  | 67% |
| 25-44  | 80% |
| 45-64  | 71% |
| 16-64 (summary)  | 75% |
| 65+  | 58% |
| <b>Base All (3219)</b>   |     |

<sup>1</sup> Please note that only 43% of respondents aged 16-24 considered themselves to be principal shoppers (responsible for at least half of the food shopping) and maybe less aware in general of increases to food prices.

Chart 1 shows the behaviour changes that people have made as a result of increases to food prices. The most popular change that people aged 65+ have made is buying food products on offer (22%) and a similar proportion of respondents have been buying fewer luxury items (21%).

One in seven respondents aged 65+ (14%) stated that they had been buying food in bulk as a result of increases to food prices. It is possible that if the food is not stored appropriately or eaten before it's use by or best before date that this may contribute to an increased risk of food poisoning (including Listeria).

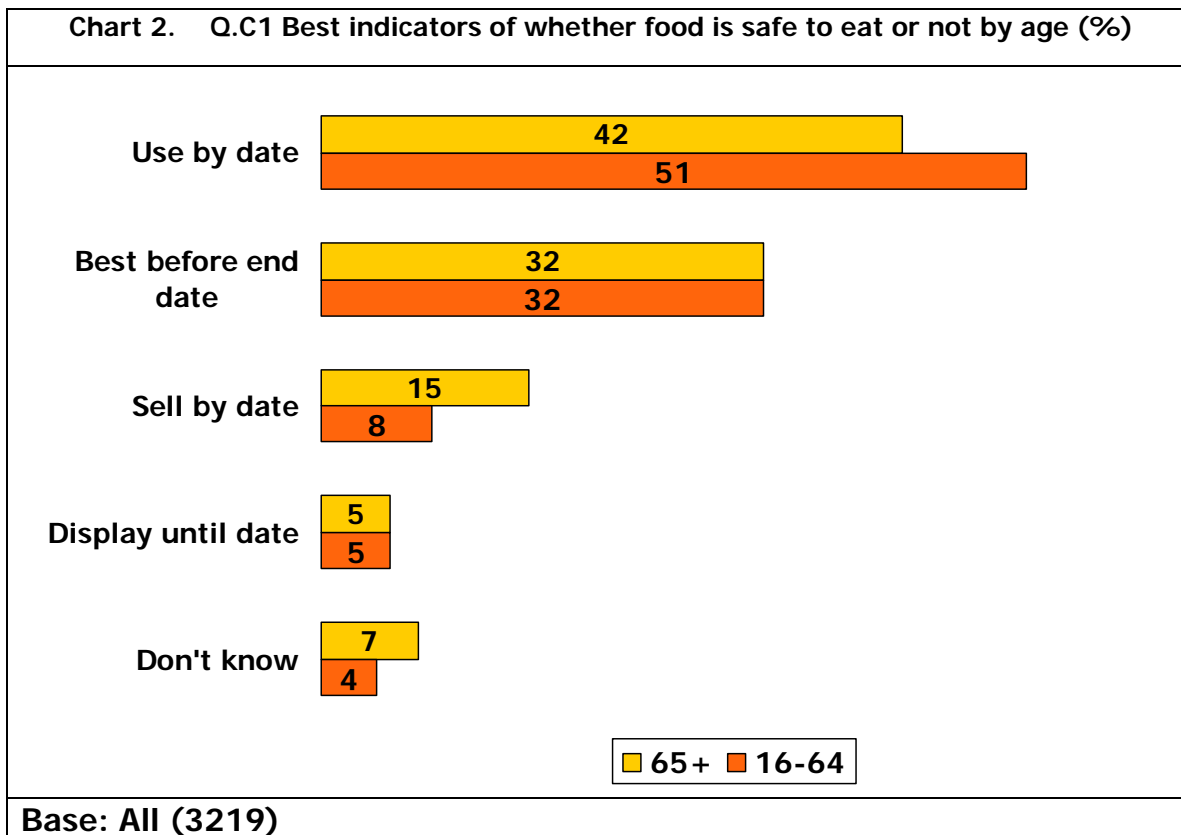
Across the various behaviours respondents aged 65+ were less likely to have made changes compared to people aged 16-64. The only exception is buying less meat where a similar proportion of respondents aged 65+ have reported this (12%) compared to those aged 16-64 (11%).



#### 4 Food safety at home

Food safety at home is a key area for combating Listeria. All respondents were asked a series of questions on different topics relating to food safety at home, specifically knowledge of date labels and behaviours relating to date labels, and fridge safety behaviour.

Respondents were shown a list of dates typically seen on packaging and asked what date they thought was the best indicator of whether food is safe to eat or not. Only two fifths of respondents (42%) aged 65+ correctly identified the use by date as the best indicator of whether food is safe to eat or not. This is significantly lower than for people aged 16-64 (Chart 2). A third of people (32%) thought that the best before end date was the best indicator of whether food was safe to eat or not.



Within the 16-64 age group there was some variation in response to this question. Just over two fifths of respondents aged 16-24 correctly identified the use by date as the best indicator of whether food was safe to eat or not, which is a similar proportion to those aged 65+. Awareness was higher amongst respondents aged 25-64, where over half correctly identified the use by date as the best indicator of whether food was safe to eat or not (Table 4).

| <b>Table 4. Q.C1 Proportion of respondents who correctly identified the use by date as the best indicator of whether food is safe to eat or not</b> |     |
|---|-----|
| 16-24   | 44% |
| 25-44   | 51% |
| 45-64   | 53% |
| 16-64 (summary)   | 51% |
| 65+   | 42% |
| <b>Base All (3219)</b>  |     |

Respondents aged 65+ from England were significantly more likely to be aware that the use by date is the best indicator of whether food is safe to eat or not, compared to people from Scotland and Northern Ireland (Table 5). People from Northern Ireland were the least likely to be aware that the use by date is the best indicator of food safety, across all ages.

| <b>Table 5. Q.C1 Proportion of respondents who correctly identified the use by date as the best indicator of whether food is safe to eat or not by country</b> |     |
|--|-----|
| England  | 43% |
| Scotland   | 32% |
| Wales  | 38% |
| Northern Ireland   | 30% |
| <b>Base All aged 65+ (636)</b>   |     |

Respondents aged 65+ from the lowest social groups were the least likely to be aware that the use by date is the best indicator of whether food was safe to eat or not (DE:37%). This is in line with the overall trend of the data where people across all ages in the lowest social groups were least likely to be aware that the use by date is the best indicator of whether food is safe to eat or not.

Men (40%) and women (43%) were equally likely to state that the use by date was the best indicator of food safety. There were no significant differences for respondents aged 65-74 compared to those aged 75+ (42% and 41% respectively).

People aged 65+ (15%) were more likely to think that the sell by date was the best indicator of whether food was safe to eat or not compared to people aged 16-64 (8%).

#### 4.1 Use of date labels

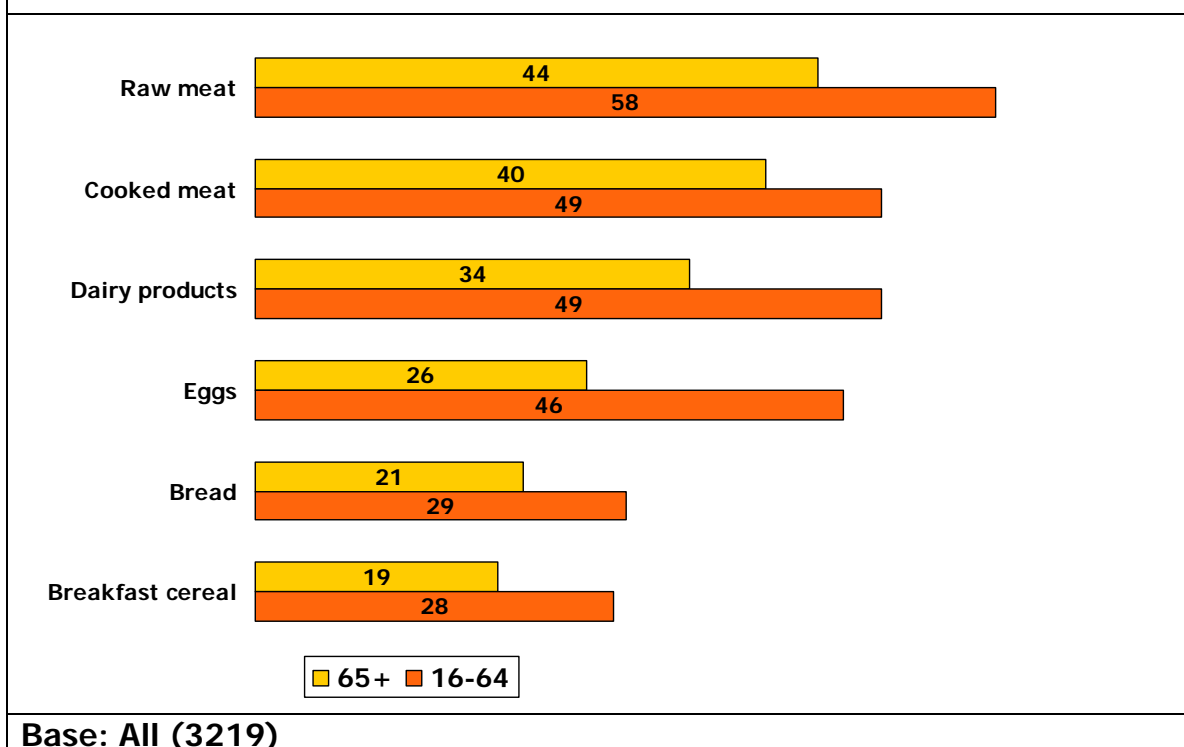
The next set of questions looks at respondents' behaviour in relation to the use by dates of particular foods. Each respondent was asked what was the maximum time after the use by date, that they would

eat certain foods. Respondents were asked about 2 different types of food (chosen at random by CAPI) from the following list<sup>2</sup>:

- Raw meat (cooked and then eaten)
- Cooked meat
- Dairy
- Eggs
- Bread
- Breakfast cereal

Across all of the different food types respondents aged 65+ were less likely than younger respondents to say that they would never eat food which is past its use by date (Chart 3). This is of particular concern when considering Listeria as a significant proportion of the population aged 65+ are prepared to eat food (including ready to eat foods such as cooked meat) which is past its use by date.

**Chart 3. Q.C2 Proportion of respondents who would never eat various foods past their use by date/BBE date by age (%)**



<sup>2</sup> If respondents stated they were vegetarian at A1 they were not asked about raw or cooked meat. If they stated they were vegan they were only asked about bread and breakfast cereal.

### Raw meat

Less than half (44%) of respondents aged 65+ said they would never cook and eat raw meat which is past its use by date compared to three fifths (58%) of respondents aged 16-64. The proportion that would never do so decreases with age (16-24 69%, 25-44 64%, 45-64 46%).

Respondents aged 65+ from Wales were significantly more likely to state that they would never cook and eat raw meat that is past its use by date compared to people aged 65+ from England (Table 6).

| <b>Table 6. Q.C2 Proportion of respondents who would never cook and eat raw meat that is past its use by date by country</b> |     |
|--|-----|
| England  | 41% |
| Scotland   | 58% |
| Wales  | 70% |
| Northern Ireland   | 66% |
| <b>Base All aged 65+ (636)</b>   |     |

The sample size is too small for statistical testing but the initial findings suggest that respondents in the AB social groups are the least likely to say they would never cook and eat raw meat which is past its use by date despite being the most likely to identify the use by date as the correct indicator of safety. It may be useful to investigate this group further through more research. The overall data showed that respondents in the highest social groups were the least likely to say they would never eat raw meat which is past its use by date.

There also don't appear to be any differences by gender for those aged over 65+. This is inline with the overall data where there was no difference by gender.

A third of respondents aged 65+ (33%) said they would cook and eat raw meat that was more than 3 days past its use by date.

### Cooked meat

Two in five respondents (40%) aged 65+ said they would never eat cooked meat past its use by date. This is a lower proportion than those aged 16-24 (46%), 25-44 (53%) and 45-64 (44%). Similar to raw meat, respondents in the AB social groups were the least likely to say they would eat cooked meat which is past its use by date. A third of people aged 65+ (34%) would eat cooked meat up to 3 days past its use by date.

### Dairy

A third of people (34%) aged 65+ would never eat dairy past its use by date, compared to over half of people aged 16-24 (56%) and 25-44 (54%) and two fifths (40%) of those aged 45-64. Two fifths of people aged 65+ (40%) would eat dairy products up to three days past its use by dates.

### Eggs

A quarter of people (26%) aged 65+ would not eat eggs past their BBE date. This is a lower proportion compared to people aged 16-24 (68%), 25-44 (49%) or 45-64 (34%). Around a half of people (52%) aged 65+ would eat eggs up to 3 days past the BBE date.

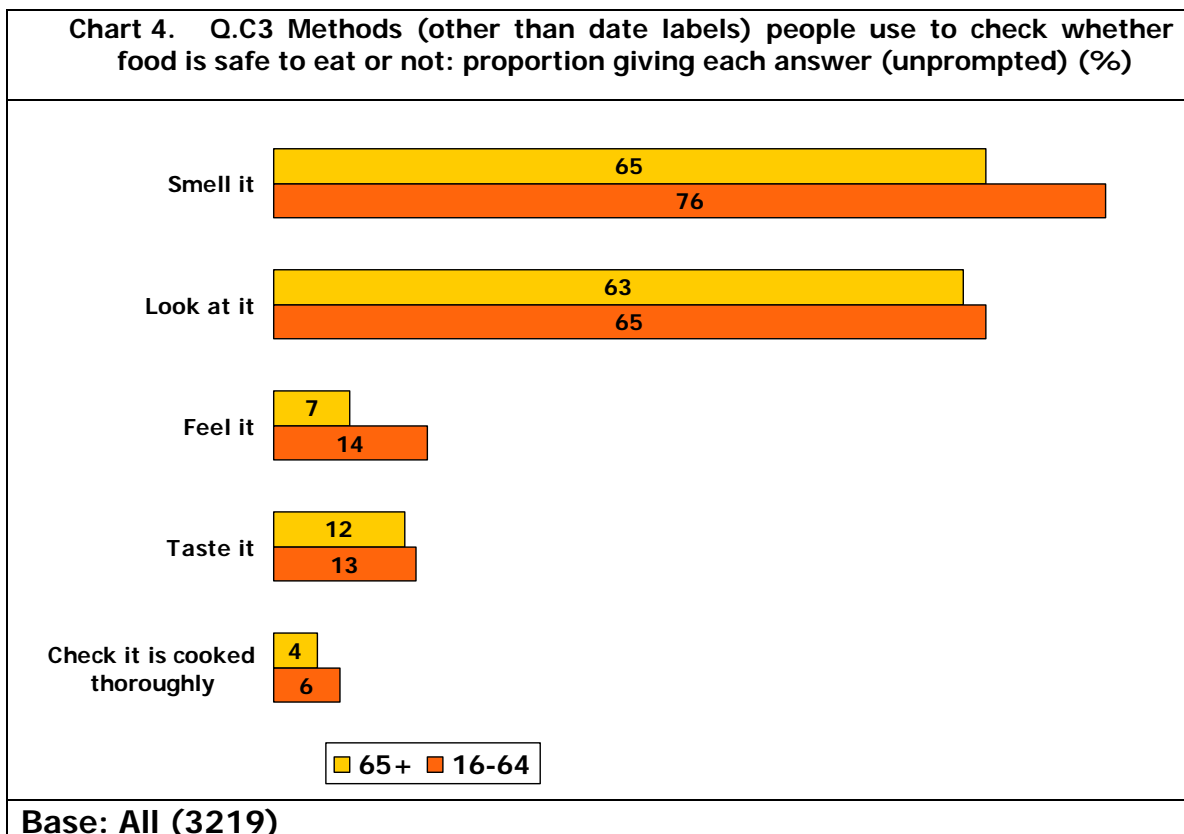
**Bread and breakfast cereal**

Respondents were less concerned by the date on bread and breakfast cereal. Only one in five respondents aged 65+ said they would never eat bread (21%) or breakfast cereal (19%) which is past its BBE date.

People aged 65+ from Scotland were more likely to state that they would never eat bread or breakfast cereal past its best before date compared to people from England (Table 7).

| <b>Table 7. Q.C2 Proportion of respondents who would eat bread or breakfast cereal that is past its best before date by country</b> |       |                  |
|---|-------|------------------|
|   | Bread | Breakfast cereal |
| England   | 19%   | 17%              |
| Scotland  | 40%   | 35%              |
| Wales   | 22%   | 17%              |
| Northern Ireland  | 48%   | 25%              |
| <b>Base All aged 65+ (636)</b>  |       |                  |

All respondents were asked, apart from using the dates on the packaging, what other ways did they use to decide whether food was safe to eat or not? Chart 4 shows the most common responses. Respondents aged 65+ reported using fewer methods for checking whether food is safe to eat or not than those aged under 65. The most popular answer for all age groups was to 'smell it' (the food), followed by to 'look at it' (the food) (Chart 4).



## 4.2 Fridge temperatures

All respondents were asked if they checked their fridge temperature at least every 6 months. Whilst those aged over 65 seem to be less cautious concerning the use of out of date food products there was very little difference concerning their fridge safety practices. Two in five respondents (39%) aged 65+ checked their fridge temperature which is the same proportion as people aged under 65 (40%). It is worth noting that there appears to be some difference in responses within the 65+ age group. Respondents aged 65-74 (43%) were more likely to check their fridge temperature than respondents aged 75+ (35%) but due to the small sample sizes these differences are not significant.

Overall 19% of people aged 65+ checked their fridge temperature using a thermometer which is a similar proportion to those aged 24-44 (18%) and 45-64 (19%) but is significantly higher than those aged 16-24 (14%)<sup>3</sup>.

Around one in seven people aged 65+ (14%) checked their fridge temperature using the gauge on their fridge which is the same percentage as respondents aged 16-24 (14%) but is significantly lower than those aged 25-44 (18%) or 45-64 (19%).

One in five people (19%) aged 65+ 'don't check their fridge temperature as they had not thought about it'. This is similar to people from other age groups (16-24: 16%, 25-44:23%, 45-64:19%) and there are no significant differences.

One in ten people aged 65+ (10%) 'had not got round to checking their fridge temperature'. This is similar to people aged 25-64 (25-44:8%, 45-64:10%) and significantly higher than those aged 16-24 (5%).

## 4.3 Food hygiene considerations

In addition to being asked specific questions relating to food hygiene in the home, respondents were asked what was important to them when deciding what to buy to eat at home and also outside of the home.

A quarter of respondents aged 65-74 (25%) said that food hygiene was important to them when deciding what to buy to eat at home. This is significantly higher than those aged 75+ where only 17% considered food hygiene important in their decision making. Food hygiene, as a consideration when deciding what to buy to eat at home, was most important to people aged 45-64 (Table 8).

There are no significant differences relating to the importance of food hygiene in the home for respondents aged 65+ for gender, country or social class but this may be due to the small sample sizes.

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<sup>3</sup> This age group were the most likely to say that someone else checks the fridge temperature.

| <b>Table 8. Q.A3 Proportion of respondents who said that food hygiene was important to them when deciding what to buy to eat at home</b> |     |
|--|-----|
| 16-24  | 18% |
| 25-44  | 23% |
| 45-64  | 31% |
| 16-64 (summary)  | 25% |
| 65-74  | 25% |
| 75+  | 17% |
| <b>Base All (3219)</b>   |     |

Higher importance was placed on food hygiene when deciding what to buy to eat outside of the home compared to inside the home.

Just over a third of respondents aged 65-74 (35%) said that food hygiene was important to them in deciding what to buy to eat outside of the home. This is a significantly higher proportion than people aged 75+ where only a quarter (26%) considered food hygiene to be important. All groups in the under 65 age group place similar levels of importance on food hygiene when deciding what to buy to eat outside of the home (Table 9).

| <b>Table 9. Q.A4 Proportion of respondents who said that food hygiene was important to them when deciding what to buy to eat outside of the home</b> |     |
|--|-----|
| 16-24  | 34% |
| 25-44  | 36% |
| 45-64  | 38% |
| 16-64 (summary)  | 37% |
| 65-74  | 35% |
| 75+  | 26% |
| <b>Base All (3219)</b>   |     |

Respondents aged 65+ in the higher social groups (ABC1) were significantly more likely to state that food hygiene was a consideration when deciding what to buy to eat outside of the home compared to people in the lower (C2DE) social classes (36% compared 26%).

There are no significant differences, in response to the importance of food hygiene outside of the home, for respondents aged 65+, for gender or country.