



# Promoting and Accelerating the Shift towards plant-based diets for a Healthier Europe: the Diabetes Case

## EVENT REPORT

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## Introduction

IDF Europe, the [Portuguese Diabetes Association \(APDP\)](#) and the [French Diabetes Federation \(FFD\)](#) have been collaborating on the 18-month project *“Eat Better, Live Better”*, supported by the international movement *“Healthy Food Healthy Planet”*. The initiative aims to **explore and promote the role of plant-based (PB) food in managing diabetes through sustainable and healthy diets**.

On April 18, project partners organised an event at the European Parliament hosted by MEP Francisco Guerreiro and titled *“Promoting and accelerating the shift towards plant-based diets for a healthier Europe: the diabetes case”*, to present the initiative’s key insights and promote recommendations to support a shift towards PB diets and a healthier Europe.

## Speakers

- **MEP Francisco Guerreiro**, Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
- **Rebecca Barlow-Noone**, person living with T1D
- **Gabriela Oliveira**, Food Expert and Book Author, APDP | [Download the presentation](#)
- **Lisandra Ribeiro**, Nutritionist, APDP | [Download the presentation](#)
- **Rogério Ribeiro**, Lead Researcher, APDP | [Download the presentation](#)
- **Maartje Roskams**, Trained Nurse and Social Worker

Moderator: **Jessica Nastos**, IDF Europe



**25 PARTICIPANTS**



## The “Eat Better Live Better” project

During the opening session, **Rogério Ribeiro**, Lead Researcher at APDP, provided an overview of the burden of diabetes on people living with the condition, societies and healthcare systems. He highlighted the **key role of healthy lifestyles in preventing and managing diabetes** and explained the complexity faced by people living with diabetes (PwD) in juggling a **complex set of daily activities** to optimally manage their condition.



Building upon these premises, he presented the rationale for the “*Eat Better Live Better*” project, which stems from the evidence on the **dual benefits of PB diets** which can not only **support diabetes management**, but also **contribute to more sustainable food systems**. Despite this, a **lack of knowledge and awareness among PwD and healthcare professionals (HCPs)** of the health benefits of these diets lead to their **limited adoption or promotion**.

As a food literacy intervention, the “*Eat Better Live Better*” initiative aims to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice and contribute to the transition to a greater inclusion of PB food in PwD’s life in a healthy, safe and sustainable way.

Rogério Ribeiro concluded by presenting the key take aways of the project, including the initial results of the **literature review** and the **online surveys** conducted in Portugal and France, as well as the lessons learned from the **food workshops** conducted with PwD and HCPs:

- Diets rich in PB products, when properly planned, can contribute to improving health outcomes for PwD.
- To support implementation within diabetes education, it is crucial to actively involve HCPs and train PwD.
- PwD demonstrated a positive attitude towards increasing the consumption of PB products and decreasing the consumption of meat-based products.
- Hands-on food workshops for PwD and HCPs showed to be effective in conveying practical knowledge and fostering motivation.
- The social marketing profile identified potential target groups for tailored intervention.

## Food workshop testimonial

During the event, participants had the opportunity to listen to the **testimonial from Marco Cardoso, living with Type 2 diabetes (T2D)**, who participated in one of the food workshops organised as part of the initiative.

In his video recording, he shared about how **changing eating habits** with the support of a nutritionist contributed to greatly **improving his diabetes management and health outcomes** as well as his **attitude towards living with the condition**. He described the experience of participating in the PB food workshop as enriching and stressed the **importance of improving access to education on healthy eating** not only for PwD but for everyone.





## The nutritionist's perspective: PB diets as a valuable tool for diabetes prevention

**Lisandra Ribeiro**, Nutritionist at APDP, shared her expertise on PB diets as a valuable tool for diabetes prevention. In her presentation, she unpacked the complexity surrounding healthy eating stressing, for example, the **importance of distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy PB diets**. Healthy plant-based diets incorporate whole grains, legumes, nuts, fruits, vegetables (oils) and tea/coffee, while unhealthy ones include fruit juices, sugar sweetened beverages, refined grains, potatoes and sweets/desserts.



She then explained how **the adoption of healthy PB diets can lower the risk of developing T2D by approximately 21%**, while unhealthy PB diets are associated with an increased risk of developing the condition.

## The HCP's perspective: “Eat better, live better” for better health outcomes

**Maartje Roskams**, Trained Nurse and Social Worker living with Type 1 diabetes (T1D), provided the perspective of HCPs and highlighted the **importance of promoting the role of PB diets in easing the burden of diabetes management** by improving blood glucose control.

She pointed out the gap in HCPs' knowledge of PB diets and stressed the **need to improve their education** and to equip them with the right tools to support PwD who may want to or may benefit from shifting towards a PB diet: *“It is not just about cutting meat out. It is a challenging assignment that needs to be framed in a positive way. It is not only up to PwD, the nurse, or the doctor. It should be a team effort in which all stakeholders work together towards a beneficial change.”*



## The policymaker's perspective: Sustainable shift towards PB diets, what can policymakers do?

MEP **Francisco Guerreiro** provided an overview of the **European Union's (EU) work on food policies**, such as the Farm to Fork strategy, and their impact on health. He then pointed out some of the EU's **missed opportunities** to play a stronger role in advancing more sustainable and healthier food systems.

MEP Guerreiro continued by stressing the importance of the **One Health approach** promoted at EU level for **connecting what we eat to people's health** as a way of improving the resilience and sustainability of our society.

He concluded by emphasizing the role that each European citizen can play at the upcoming EU Election by casting their vote for candidates that are committed to advancing the One Health approach.





## The PwD's perspective: Integrating long-term consumption of PB diets for better diabetes management and improved quality of life

Rebecca Barlow-Noone, Diabetes Advocate, provided the perspective of PwD and reiterated the **importance of feeling supported by HCPs in shifting towards healthier diets**. She highlighted the constant challenges faced by PwD in their daily lives, where dietary choices play a crucial role in managing their condition. Despite this, **nutritional guidance from HCPs, particularly regarding plant-based diets, is often lacking**.

She concluded by underscoring the **need for structural changes within our societies to ensure that healthy food options, including plant-based choices, are accessible and affordable to all**.



## Changing the world, one food workshop at the time

Gabriela Oliveira, Food Expert and Book Author, shared her experience on the **barriers and enablers** that people often experience **in shifting towards PB diets**. She explained how **food workshops** can play a key role in **addressing misinformation** surrounding plant-based diets. They can **get people motivated** and help them **acquire cooking skills** that will support and sustain their shift towards healthy eating.





## Discussion with the audience

**Remark:** *“Shifting towards more PB diets will not only benefit PwD but also people living with other NCDs and the population’s health in general. Cooperation between all stakeholders committed to improve health for people living with NCDs is essential to continue pushing for the promotion of PB diets.”*

**Q:** *“What could be the impact of the Nutriscore being widely implemented at EU level?”*

**MEP Guerreiro:** *“The debate surrounding the Nutriscore and food labelling is very complex and subject to strong political interests. I believe that the debate should prioritise the interest and health of consumers rather than the industry. Harmonising the labelling system across the EU will be essential over the coming years.”*

**Q:** *“How can we increase awareness of the benefits of PB diets and reach the lower socio-economic groups in our societies?”*

**Rogério Ribeiro:** *“Patient associations can play a key role by widening their network and by collaborating with HCPs associations to provide training and develop awareness campaigns and outreach strategies in local communities.”*

**Gabriela Oliveira:** *“Training programmes on healthy eating in schools are also essentials. In Portugal, I am often invited to organise healthy food workshops and train professionals who prepare meals for public schools, hospitals, prisons, etc.”*

**MEP Guerreiro:** *“Establishing strategic relationships with political parties, municipalities, and regional and national governments can be effective in raising awareness with decision-makers and influencing the budget allocated, for example, on food for public schools.”*

IDF Europe, APDP and the FFD wish to thank MEP Francisco Guerreiro for hosting the event, all the speakers for contributing with their insightful expertise, and the *“Healthy Food Healthy Planet”* movement for supporting the *“Eat Better Live Better”* project.

[For more information about the project, visit the website here.](#)



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