

# Workshop with the Active Minds Group Blackpool Carers 13 March 2020

Hayley Alter  
Dr Emmanuel Tseklevs



A report for Seafood-AGE by

**imagination**  
LANCASTER

# Workshop with the Active Minds Group

## Blackpool Carers

### 13 March 2020

Hayley Alter  
Dr Emmanuel Tsekleves

## Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| About the workshop                            | 4  |
| Emerging insights from the discussion         | 8  |
| Lesson learned from the workshop              | 12 |
| Next steps                                    | 14 |
| Acknowledgements                              | 15 |
| Contact the authors                           | 15 |
| Document identification, disclaimer & history | 16 |

---

**Credit for image on front cover: “South Beach.” by Ali Harrison is licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0**



**Food supplied to the workshop by  
 Blackpool Food Partnership.**

## About the workshop

On 13 March 2020, Hayley Alter, Seafood Age Research Associate held a workshop with the Active Minds group at Blackpool Carers Centre. Blackpool Carers Centre<sup>1</sup> is a charity that supports, trains and brings respite, information and advocacy to people of all ages who care for dependents in the region. Active Minds is a group that meet for weekly sessions for older couples in which one spouse or partner has dementia and the other provides round-the-clock care. The workshop had two aims: 1. To explore group members' fish and seafood eating practices, and subsequent barriers to consuming Ready to Eat fish and seafood products and; 2. To test approaches to exchanging practices of eating fish and seafood, and sharing stories about how they developed and what they are like now. To prompt recollections of the memories, traditions and interactions with products and packaging that have helped to form their habits, we held a food-tasting session using canned and ready-to-eat fish and seafood products supplied by Blackpool Food Partnership. We also looked at pictures of packaged products and local seafood-related landmarks in this coastal area now attractive for retirees who once holidayed here. To exchange practices, we designed a proforma that guided group members to describe a fish or seafood recipe that they tend to prepare. Six people attended: two husband and wife couples, and two staff members who support the Active Minds group. This report explores emerging insights from the discussion including reflections on the methods used and considerations for development.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.blackpoolcarers.org/>





Example of historical image of fish and seafood eaten in Blackpool

**Your name/s**

**Recipe name**

**Ingredients**

**Serves**

**Preparation time**

**Cooking time**

**Difficulty**

**Method**

Recipe tool used in workshop

**Serving  
suggestion**

**Alternative  
ingredients**

**What to do  
with leftovers?**

**When do you  
make this recipe?**

**Where do you  
get the fish or  
seafood?**

**Who do you  
make it  
...for?**

**...with?**





Discussion and food tasting  
during the workshop



## Emerging insights from the discussion

**Preparing and eating fish and seafood is a barrier for older adults with caring responsibilities as well as those who are cared-for. Eating fresh fish in the past has been replaced with reliance on frozen, microwaveable and ready-to-eat fish products.**

From fish and chips, to the fishmongers, to oysters on the promenade, in the past, fish and seafood was eaten fresh. It had to be bought, prepared and eaten on the same day because it would not last longer than a day. It tasted best that way.

*“We had fish and chips on Friday... [and we] would wait until holiday to have shellfish... We used to go to Scarborough for our holidays.... There used to be stalls on the front with cockles and mussels and shrimp... You had to eat [it] on the same day. Fresh tasted better...”*

In both couples attending the group, the husbands were caring for their wives now living with dementia. Both husbands had rarely cooked in the past and now their time was taken up with caring responsibilities. For one woman, her diet was restricted further because she could not remember the foods she ate before she had dementia and needed foods that were simple to eat. As a result, group members were all reliant on frozen and refrigerated ready-to-eat food products from the supermarket which they can buy days, weeks or even months in advance, and can be heated quickly in the microwave or oven, requiring little or no preparation. Though they all talked about eating fish and chips in the past, they did not often eat it now. Their go-to fish meals included ready-made cod in parsley sauce, scampi with microwaveable chips, and fish finger butties. This allowed relatively small scope for eating fish and seafood at all. It also meant that food wastage rarely occurred in their households (packaging waste was not discussed). Ready-to-eat meals constrained how much they eat while a lack of confidence and skill in cooking fish and seafood meant they were not likely to risk food preparation beyond heating instructions. One participant said, *“I’d like to be capable of [just smelling and looking at food to see if its OK] but I’m not a good cook so I so I don’t trust my judgement.”*





Discussion and food tasting  
during the workshop



**Group members are reliant on ready-to-eat fish products, but they see ‘processes’ and ‘preservatives’ used in them as detrimental to taste, smell, and therefore, nutritional value.**

One participant talked about the importance of getting nutrients from fish and how they were looking for simple ways to do it. They tended to buy ready-made tuna sandwiches. The group discussed mashing and spreading tinned mackerel on toast as an alternative. They also discussed how many of them liked the convenience of frozen fish fillets and felt that they looked far enough removed from their original state to be appealing

*“Yeah, its convenient to cook from frozen isn’t it?... I like to cook from fresh if I could because I do think its tastes nicer. But then I tend to buy the packs of frozen like white cod fillets or haddock fillets frozen because it is quite convenient... I don’t like to see the skin so much... it reminds me too much that it’s actually a fish”*

However, for one group member, there was also a visual balance to strike when eating fish and seafood. They did not want to see skin but *“equally if it [looks] too uniform in shape, I think that’s been too processed.”* The product also needed to have the taste of fresh fish.

*“I like something that’s got a slight tanginess and taste... You wouldn’t eat salmon and chips [because] they wouldn’t go together [so] we all have cod and chips... [but] the salmon and the pichards and the sushi, they all have that tang taste.”*

Linking look, taste and smell with nutrition, the group saw *“processed”* fish and the preservatives in ready-to eat fish as removing *“the original taste”*, smells, and therefore nutrients, from fish. This seemed to lead to confidence that frozen or refrigerated fish products keep well but lack nutrition.

*“There is a lot of preservatives in these fish foods and now they do keep longer which takes the original taste out the fish. Fresh fish tastes like fresh fish but the frozen one, it could be frozen for years, and you don’t know that.”*

*“Even if you use the freezer [or] the fridge, [the fish] will be deteriorating in taste... if you keep it too long. It might be safe but... It’s going to steadily be less and less nutritious.”*

The sense of how processed a fish and seafood product might be was a far stronger indicator of nutritional value than information printed on the packaging. They were also not strongly influenced by kite marks and other references to environmental sustainability and provenance of ingredients. They were checking sell-by and use-by dates, and storage instructions and used this information for meal planning and how they stocked their fridges. While they relied to some extent on pictures to indicate freshness, group members discussed their mistrust of packaging that obscured the product completely. To one group member, most untrustworthy of all were non-perishable fish and seafood meals. If it lacked fresh ingredients, how nutritious could it be and how much fish would it contain? They discussed a “Mexican Tuna Salad” bought but not eaten in the tasting session. They would not want to buy it or eat it because the packaging hid the contents and they did not trust that the photo was representative. They said that they did not usually check ingredients in the supermarket but checking them in the workshop confirmed their perceptions.

*“You read it. There’s a quarter only, twenty-five percent actual tuna. And [the packaging] says, ‘tuna’. It doesn’t say, ‘tuna and beans and whatever’. It’s tuna salad so you think that when you’re going to get it. It would at least be fifty to seventy-five percent of tuna... but there’s hardly any tuna in it.”*



## Lessons learned from the workshop

This report has documented the workshop held with the Active Minds group at Blackpool Carers on 13 March 2020. For this workshop, we used food-tasting and images of fish and seafood products and local places to prompt conversation about fish and seafood eating practices. We also used a recipe proforma designed to help group members use the example of a single fish and seafood recipe to describe and exchange wider fish and seafood preparation and eating practices and barriers. The food tasting and images were useful to prompt general conversation about the memories, sensations and experiences they associate with eating fish and seafood. It was through these conversations that group members started to talk about the ready-made products they eat and how they contrast with memories of eating fresh fish and seafood. As the workshop progressed, the prospect of using the recipe tool began to seem less relevant because of group members' reliance on ready-to-eat products. None-the-less we experimented with it in the last twenty minutes of the workshop. The group members were not sure how to use it at first and remarked on how it seemed disjointed from the experience of the rest of the workshop.

In designing the recipe proforma, we had assumed that group members were preparing fish or seafood meals from scratch at least some of the time. However, for this group, the kind of preparation that the tool assumed rarely, if ever, takes place. This highlights two important insights for the project. The first is methodological: we have learned that an absence of cooking practices is, of course, a barrier to eating fish and seafood but learning about established cooking practices does not tell us about older peoples' relationships with ready to eat fish and seafood meals and products. The research we go on to carry out with older people needs to focus on this relationship to fish and seafood ready-to-eat products. The second insight we gained so far is that the relationship between older people and the ready-to-eat fish and seafood products they eat can be characterised by both reliance and mistrust. Nutrition in fish and seafood is perceived as linked to freshness without the use of preservatives and other processes. Knowing that ready meals are preserved and processed, group members questioned their nutritional value. This could well lead to them eating them less than other kinds of ready-to-eat products in day to day life. The extent to which the prototype Seafood Age product will be 'processed' will be, in large part, to ensure its nutritional value when consumed. That said, the poor perception of nutrition in processed fish and seafood products surfaced in this workshop indicates that a new design consideration must be to address this barrier either through product or packaging.



Recipe tool in use  
during the workshop



## Next steps

To explore the relationship between older people and the ready-to-eat fish and seafood products they eat, we are now designing three activities for online participation to enable open-ended responses from older people participating in the research. These activities aim to explore values, perceptions and practicalities associated with eating fish and seafood ready to eat products. The first activity is word association. What words and other responses do research participants think of when you look at images of fresh fish and seafood? What do you they think of when the look at images of fish and seafood ready meals and products? The second activity is a description of their last fish or seafood ready meal. What was it? Where did they buy it? How did they prepare it? Did they enjoy it? Was it enough? Why did they buy it? What did they think of its cost, taste, appearance, need for preparation, freshness and nutritional value? The third activity is a fish and seafood diary that aims to find out how often research participants are shopping, what refrigerated and frozen, fish and seafood ready-to-eat meals and products do they buy and when are they eating them and how does this compare to other meals? The insights we hope to gain from this engagement with older people will help to inform areas of discussion with other stakeholders across the ready to eat fish and seafood value chain. The development and outcomes from this work will be documented in future reports and blog posts.

---

## Acknowledgements

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Adult Carers' Respite Co-ordinator and Support Worker, Claire Law and Katrina Shuttleworth at Blackpool Carers Centre for kindly accomodating and helping to organise the Seafood AGE workshop with the Active Minds group. Likewise, we thank the Active Minds group members for kindly sharing their time and experiences with us. Finally, we thank Blackpool Food Partnership for kindly supplying the non-perishable fish products for the workshop tasting session without charge.

## Contact the authors

Hayley Alter - [h.alter@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:h.alter@lancaster.ac.uk)  
Dr. Emmanuel Tseklevs - [e.tseklevs@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:e.tseklevs@lancaster.ac.uk)

# Workshop with the Active Minds Group

Blackpool Carers

13 March 2020

## DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| Work Package | WP3 and WP5   |
| Action       | WP3 - Acceptance of SEAFOOD-AGE products by older adults<br>WP5 - Co-design of seafood products |
| Version      | 3.0   |
| Last update  | Friday 14 August 2020   |
| Author(s)    | Hayley Alter, Dr Emmanuel Tseklevs  |
| Participants | 6 people - 4 members of the Active Minds group and 2 group leaders                              |

## DISCLAIMER

This document covers activities implemented with the financial assistance of the European Union. The views expressed herein should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of the European Union, and the European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

## DOCUMENT HISTORY

| DATE       | AUTHOR/EDITOR (PARTNER)                    | DESCRIPTION                       |
|------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 14/08/2020 | ImaginationLancaster, Lancaster University | Short report on research activity |