

Are Brits becoming more adventurous in the kitchen?

What comes into your mind when you think of British food? Probably fish and chips, or a dinner of meat and two vegetables. But is British food really so bland and uninteresting? Despite a reputation for less-than-spectacular cuisine, Britain is producing more and more top-class chefs who dominate our television screens and whose recipe books frequently top the best seller lists.

It's thanks to these TV chefs that Britons are turning away from ready-made meals and becoming more adventurous in their cooking habits. It seems that TV programmes have the power to bring a higher profile to cooking and are wielding real influence on what people cook at home.

According to a new study from market analysts, 1 in 5 Britons claim that watching cookery programmes on TV has encouraged them to try different food. Almost one third say they now use a wider variety of ingredients than they used to, and 24% say they now buy better quality ingredients than before. One in four adults say that TV chefs have made them much more confident about their culinary knowledge and skills, and young people are more interested in cooking. With an increasing number of male chefs on TV, it's no longer 'uncool' for boys to like cooking. Cookery shows and documentaries about food are broadcast during prime-time evening slots on television.

Many of the new celebrity chefs promote modern 'fusion cuisine', which blends classic 'British' cooking with international and exotic influences. The chefs are younger, more beautiful and more experimental. Jamie Oliver was only 23 when he first appeared on British television screens. More than 4 million people tuned in to his popular show 'Jamie's Kitchen'. The show began as an experiment and turned into a phenomenon. Jamie gave himself nine months to take a team of unemployed 16 to 24-year-olds, with virtually no previous experience of cooking, and transform them into top class chefs to work in his new restaurant in East London, 'Fifteen'. Jamie left school himself without formal qualifications and believes that with a passion for food, anyone can become a good cook. 'Fifteen' has become a hit in London and is booked up months in advance.

Jamie Oliver has proved to be a huge inspiration for British people. The recent survey finds that the number of those sticking to a traditional diet is slowly declining and around half of Britain's consumers would like to change or improve their cooking in some way. There has also been a rise in the number of students applying for food courses at UK universities and colleges. Having been ridiculed for centuries for its mediocre cuisine, is Britain now competing with countries such as France and Italy in the field of culinary excellence?

Decide whether the following statements are true or false:

- 1) Britain is starting to get a reputation for bad cuisine.
- 2) Advertising campaigns are encouraging British people to try new foods.
- 3) The most popular TV chefs in Britain are younger and more charismatic than they used to be.
- 4) 'Jamie's Kitchen' is a TV programme about ordinary people who set up their own restaurants with no cooking experience.
- 5) Jamie's restaurant 'Fifteen' will be opening in several months' time.
- 6) The traditional British diet may be dying out.

Questions for Discussion

- Apart from popular cooking programmes, can you think of any other reasons why people may be changing their cooking and eating habits in Britain? Think about the following factors:
 - Travel
 - Health
 - Vegetarianism
 - Ingredients available
- Have there been many changes in your country? Are there any 'new' foods?
- Do you ever cook? If so, what do you like to cook?
- Would you like to train to work in Jamie Oliver's restaurant, 'Fifteen'? Why/why not?