

CANADIANS AND NUTRITION

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Further, overall importance of nutrition is in decline



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Toronto, Ontario– While eight in ten (79%) Canadians agree that nutrition is important to them according to an Ipsos-Reid/National Institute of Nutrition study released today, only three in ten (28%) consider themselves very knowledgeable about food and nutrition compared to family and friends.

In fact just over half (53%) say that nutrition is ‘extremely’ (17%) or ‘very’ (36%) important to them in choosing the food that they eat. Comparing these findings with previous waves of the research, the data suggests that the overall importance of nutrition is in decline amongst Canadians (1989 59%; 1994 66%; 1997 62%). A further one third (35%) admit that nutrition is ‘quite’ important in making their food choices, and one in ten (12%) say that nutrition is not an important factor (not very important 10%; not important at all 2%).

These are the findings of a National Institute of Nutrition poll conducted in December 2001 by Ipsos-Reid. The poll is based on a randomly selected sample of 2000 adult Canadians 18 years or older. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within $\pm 2.2\%$ percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult Canadian population been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population. These data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Canadian population according to the 1996 Census data.

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As noted above only three in ten (28%) consider themselves very knowledgeable about food and nutrition compared to family and friends, another two thirds (64%) admit to being only 'somewhat' knowledgeable.

Overall, four in ten (38%) say that their eating habits are 'excellent' (6%) or 'very good' (32%) and another four in ten (42%) saying their eating habits are 'good'. The main reasons for the six percent who rate their eating habits as excellent are that they 'watch what they eat' (29%) and that 'they feel good and want to maintain their health' (22%). For those who feel that their eating habits are 'very good', emphasis is on eating behaviour such as 'eating a balanced diet' (30%) and 'watching what they eat' (26%), which is echoed by those who feel their eating habits are 'good' (23% and 21% respectively).

However, increasing constantly since the 1994 wave of this research is the proportion of Canadians who rate their eating habits as 'fair' or 'poor' (1994 15%; 1997 17%; 2001 21%). Of the one in five (21%) who do not rate their eating habits as generally 'good', most rate their eating habits as fair (17%), with only four percent saying their eating habits are poor. The main factors mentioned as contributing to this groups poorer eating habits include a 'busy lifestyle' (19%), and 'eating take-out or fast foods' (12%).

Even though one fifth (21%) of Canadians admit to having fair or poor eating habits, a full nine in ten (92%) say that they are currently making an effort to eat well, and two thirds (62%) admit that they have made changes over the past year to improve their eating habits. These efforts are being done primarily by 'eating more fruits and vegetables' (33%) and 'trying to consume less fat' (28%).



Other key findings from the study include:

Importance of nutrition:

- Older Canadians (55+-- 56%) are significantly more likely than are younger Canadians (18-34-- 32%) to strongly agree that nutrition is important to them and they always watch what they eat.
- Similarly older Canadians (91%) are more likely than younger (86%) Canadians to say that nutrition is important in choosing the foods they eat.
- Women (83%) are more likely than men (76%) to agree that nutrition is very important to them and that nutrition is an important factor in choosing the food they eat (92% versus 85%).

Eating habits:

- Nine in ten (92%) report that they are currently making an effort to eat well, and close to two thirds (62%) say that they have made changes over the past year to improve their eating habits. Combined, these efforts are made by eating more fruits and vegetables (33%), trying to consume less fat (28%), reducing sugar intake (9%), reducing calorie intake (9%), eating less red meat (8%), watching what they eat (7%), eating a balanced diet (6%), snacking less (6%), avoiding fast food restaurants (5%), increasing protein intake (5%), and eating more fiber (5%).
- More middle aged (66%) Canadians than older Canadians (58%) have made changes over the past year to improve their eating habits.
- Those with a university education (67%) are more likely to have recently made changes to improve their eating habits than Canadians with a high school education or less (55%).



- Overall more women (41%) than men (35%) say their eating habits are 'excellent' (5% women; 7% men) or 'very good' (36% women; 28% men) .
- Older Canadians (46%) are more likely to say that their eating habits are 'excellent' (9%) or 'very good' (37%), than are middle aged (38%-- 'excellent' 5%; 'very good' 33%) and younger Canadians (30%-- 'excellent' 4%; 'very good' 26%).

Nutrition and food choices:

In order to help themselves eat more nutritiously, most Canadians are reading the labels on their food products. About eight in ten of all respondents say they often or sometimes select foods they eat based on the amount of fiber (80%) and vitamins (79%). Seven in ten say they often or sometimes select food based on the amount of calcium (74%), calories (74%), and total fat (67%). A smaller majority will look for the amount of sugar (65%), saturated fat (63%), iron (62%), cholesterol (59%), salt (57%) caffeine (54%) and omega-3 fat (51%) often or sometimes in their food.

- Middle aged Canadians (69%) are more likely than older Canadians (61%) to look for total fat in the food products they select.
- Women are more likely than men to often or sometimes select foods based on fiber (84% versus 76%), calcium (82% versus 66%), total fat (71% versus 62%), iron (68% versus 55%) and omega-3 fat (54% versus 47%).

In deciding between food choices, more Canadians are influenced by wanting to maintain good health (95%) and personal weight considerations (72%), than they are about selecting prescribed food for a specific diet (52%), or negative media coverage (46%).



While more than 90% of all Canadians, regardless of age (18-34-- 94%, 35-54-- 96%, 55+ --96%) say that maintaining good health is 'very' or 'somewhat' influential, there are some real generation difference in terms of how each of the other three topics influence food choice.

- Weight loss or maintaining current weight is an influential factor for more middle aged (75%) and older Canadians (74%) than it is for younger Canadians (67%).
- Choosing food that is suitable for a special or prescribed diet, is also an influence to more middle aged (53%) and older (58%) Canadians.
- Negative media coverage will bear more influence on middle aged (51%) Canadians than it will on older (42%) or younger (44%) Canadians.

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