

SO, WHAT FOODS ARE CANADIANS EATING AND HOW HEALTHY DO THEY THINK THEY ARE EATING?

A PROFILE OF CANADA'S EATING AND FOOD PURCHASING HABITS



Public Release Date: July 10th, 2002

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Almost Three-In-Four (73%) Canadians Claim To Eat A Well Balanced and Healthy Diet or Mainly Healthy Food with Some Gaps

However, Fewer Than One-In-Five (17%) Canadians Consume the Canada Food Guide Recommended 5 Servings of Fruits or Vegetables Yesterday, And Only 5% Consumed the Recommended Servings Of Cereal, Grains Or Bread.

Four-in-Ten (43%) Indicate they Generally Eat What They Want, But 28% of Canadians Say They Have Been on a Diet or Participated in an Official Weight Loss Program During the Past Year

One-in-Four (22%) Always Read the Nutritional and Calorie Content (27%) or the List of Ingredients (23%) on Food that They Purchase

Toronto, ONTARIO – According to an Ipsos-Reid poll conducted on behalf of CTV and The Globe and Mail, Canadians think their eating habits are good. In fact, almost three-in-four (73%) Canadians say they eat a well balanced and healthy diet or mainly healthy food with some gaps.

However, fewer than one-in-five (17%) Canadians had five servings of fruits or vegetables during the previous day (as recommended by the Canadians Food Guide). Similarly, only 5% of Canadians ate the recommended servings of cereal, grains or bread. Perhaps to



compensate for any nutritional gaps, one-half (52%) of Canadians indicate they take vitamin supplements regularly.

While four-in-ten (43%) claim they eat what they want and give little thought to their weight, 28% of Canadians say that over the past year they have been on a limited-calorie diet or participated in an official weight loss program.

Further, Canadians are limiting or increasing their intake of specific food ingredients. Six-in-ten Canadians indicate that they try to completely avoid consuming foods with cholesterol (60%) or with MSG (58%). In the same vein, just over one-half (56%) say they try to avoid salt, while one-in-two Canadians try to avoid sugar (48%) and polyunsaturated fats (46%). In contrast, almost one-half (46%) of Canadians are actively trying to eat more red meat and 37% are trying to eat more organic food.

In keeping with the conscious effort to eat or avoid certain foods, one-in-five (27% and 23% respectively) always read the nutritional and calorie information or the list of ingredients on a package of food when they purchase it. A similar proportion (22% and 20% respectively), however, claim they never read this information.

One-in-four (27%) Canadians have made all dinner meals from scratch during the past 7 days. Among Canadians that had take-out/ordered food in, ate in a restaurant and/or prepared a frozen meal, 81%, 43% and 39% respectively claimed that at least one of these meals was fast food (e.g., pizza, fried chicken or hamburgers).

These are the findings of Ipsos-Reid/CTV/Globe and Mail polls conducted between March 12th and March 14th; April 16th and 18th; and April 30th and May 2nd, 2002. Each poll is based on a



randomly selected sample of 1,000 adult Canadians per wave. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within ± 3.1 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.

What Canadians Think About Their Own Eating Habits And What Improvement They Believe Their Diet Needs

Generally, Canadians think their eating habits are good. In fact, almost three-in-four (73%) Canadians says they eat a well balanced and healthy diet or mainly healthy food with some gaps. One-in-five (22%) claim to eat less healthy diets, although only a small minority (4%) say that they do not usually eat well.

- Canadians living in British Columbia are more likely to claim to eat healthy (80%), while only 69% of Albertans and 65% of those in the Maritimes make this claim.
- Consistent with other research, younger Canadians, between the ages of 18-34, eat less healthy diets than individuals 55 and older. One-in-three (32%) younger Canadians admit that their diet needs improvement, compared with just 17% of older Canadians.
- Similarly, Canadians in low income households (34%) eat less healthy diets overall than those in high income households (24%).
- Canadians generally view any dietary gaps to be most related to not eating enough fruits and vegetables (32%), too much sugar and sweets (23%), junk food (13%) and oil/fats (11%).



Other measures taken by Canadians to eat more healthy include try to avoid consuming food with cholesterol (60%) or with MSG (58%). In the same vein, just over half (56%) say they try to avoid salt and approximately one-in-two Canadians try to avoid sugar (48%) and polyunsaturated fats (46%). In contrast, almost one-half (46%) of Canadians are actively trying to eat more red meat and 37% are trying to eat more organic foods.

- Regionally, more Canadians living in British Columbia (43%), Quebec (42%) and the Atlantic Provinces (39%) are actively trying to eat more organic foods. At the same time, those in British Columbia are the most likely to be trying to avoid MSG (80%).
- Active control over foods consumed appears to increase with age. While Canadians 55 years of age and older are actively trying to avoid cholesterol (70% versus 53% of 18 to 34 year olds), salt (64% versus 51%), MSG (63% versus 55%), sugar (55% versus 37%) and polyunsaturated fats (48% versus 42%), fewer younger Canadians are concerned about these ingredients. Canadians between the ages of 18-34 are most actively trying to eat more red meat (51%) and organic foods (41%).
- One-half (52%) of men are actively trying to eat more red meat compared to 40% of women.

Despite this, one-in-five admit to never reading the nutritional and calorie information (22%) or the list of ingredients (20%) on food packages when they are shopping. In comparison, a similar proportion of one-in-five (27% and 23% respectively) claim that they always read this information. While informed shopping is unrelated to education or household composition, gender, age and region do influence the tendency to read nutritional information.

- Canadians 55 years of age and older (29% and 31% respectively) and women (36 and 32% respectively) are both more likely to always read the nutritional and calorie information and the list of ingredients on the package of food when they are purchasing it.
- Canadians living in British Columbia (28% and 32% respectively) and Ontario (32% and 27% respectively) are the most likely to always read the nutritional and calorie



information and the list of ingredients on the package of food when shopping. In contrast, only 18% of Canadians living in Atlantic Canada and 17% in Alberta consistently read the list of ingredients on food packages while shopping.

How Well Do Canadians Follow the Canada Food Guide?

According to the Canada Food Guide (Health Canada), Canadian adults are advised to eat 5 to 10 servings of fruit or vegetables; 5 to 12 servings of cereal, grains and bread; 2 to 3 servings of meat, fish, poultry, eggs or beans, and 2 to 3 servings of dairy products such as milk, cheese and yogurt each day.

Asked about the day before they were surveyed, most Canadians report having at least one serving of fruit or vegetables (93%); cereal, grains and bread (93%); meat, fish, poultry, eggs or beans (92%) and dairy products such as milk, cheese and yogurt (89%) during the previous day. Further, four-in-five (80%) report consuming butter, margarine, oil or salad. Fewer, but still a majority (60%), report having candy, chips and pop or a sweet dessert.

Fewer than one-in-five (17%) Canadians had even the minimum recommended 5 servings of fruits or vegetables during the previous day. Only 5% of Canadians consumed the recommended servings of cereal, grains or bread. In contrast, more than one-half Canadians (53%) ate at least the recommended servings of meat, fish, poultry, eggs or beans and 63% had their dairy product allotment – indicating that Canadians may be eating enough meat and dairy products but not enough fruit, vegetables and grain products.

- While four-in-ten Canadians who claim to eat a balanced and healthy diet or mainly healthy diet (25% and 19% respectively) ate 5 or more servings of fruit and vegetables the previous day, only 5% of those who eat a less healthy diet said the same.



- Women (24%) were most likely to have eaten five or more servings of fruits and vegetables the previous day.
- Similarly, more Canadians from high income households (\$60K+) consumed the recommended number of servings of fruit and vegetables (21%) than did Canadians from low income households (11%).
- Younger Canadians (68%) were more likely to be enjoying sweets than older Canadians (47%).

Perhaps in response to the occasional gaps in their nutritional intake, one-half (52%) of Canadians claim to take vitamin supplements regularly.

- Three-in-five (62%) British Columbians take vitamin supplements, compared to 37% of those living in Atlantic Canada.
- Similarly, Canadians over the age of 55 (56%) and women (59% versus 46% of men) take more vitamin supplements.

Canadian Weight Watching

While 43% of Canadians indicate they eat what they want and give little thought to their weight, an equal proportion (40%) claim to occasionally give up certain foods in order to maintain a healthy weight. Close to one-in-six (14%) say they sometimes (10%) or routinely (4%) follow specified weight loss diets or programs in order to lose weight. More specifically, 28% agree that they have been on a limited-calorie diet or participated in an official weight loss program in the past year.

- Although Quebecois are least concerned about their weight maintenance or loss (9% diet to lose weight), one-in-three (33%) claim that they have been on a limited-calorie diet or participated in an official weight loss program in the past year. In contrast, Atlantic Canadians are the most weight conscious (22% are attempting to control their weight in



this province), however, three-in-four (75%) say that they have not been on a limited-calorie diet or participated in an official weight loss program in the past year.

- Dieting continues to be a gender-based activity, with one-in-five (19%) women who watch their weight, compared to 8% of men. Further, one-in-three (32%) women have been on a limited-calorie diet or participated in an official weight loss program in the past year.
- More Canadians between the ages of 55 or older (32%) and between 35 and 54 (31%) claim they have been on a limited-calorie diet or participated in an official weight loss program in the past year.

One-Quarter (27%) of Canadian Say All Their Dinners Made from Scratch During Previous Week

Most Canadians (94%) had at least one main meal from scratch in the previous 7 days. More than one-in-four (27%) claim that every main meal consumed during the previous 7 days was made from scratch. On average, Canadians claim to have consumed just under than five out of seven dinners made from scratch, during the previous week.

- Regionally, almost one-in-three (32%) Canadians living in Quebec and Atlantic Canada report that all of their main meals during the previous 7 days were from scratch.

Fewer than one-half of Canadians (41%) reheated a prepared frozen meal during the previous 7 days. Similarly, 37% of Canadians ate one or more meals in a restaurant during the previous 7 days. One-in-three (33%) report having take-out or ordered food in during the previous 7 days.



- Close to one-half of those living in Ontario (50%), Manitoba/Saskatchewan (47%) and Alberta (45%) report to have reheated at least one frozen dinner during the previous week. This is higher than their counterparts in British Columbia (36%), the East (34%), or Québec (30%).

More than one-in-three (37%) Canadians over the age of 55 cooked all of their main meals from scratch in the previous week, compared to only 19% of those between the ages of 18-34. In contrast, almost one-half of younger Canadians (47%) report having had at least one take-out meal or ordered food home during the previous 7 days, compared to only 15% of older Canadians.

- Not surprisingly, more Canadians from high income households report having take-out/ordered in (40%) or eaten in a restaurant (40%) than Canadians from low income households (25% and 29%, respectively). In contrast, more Canadians from low income households have made every meal from scratch (32% versus 22%).
- Significantly more men (37%) had take-out/ordered in meals than women (29%) during the previous 7 days.

How Much Fast Food Have Canadians Eaten During the Past 7 Days?

What we think of as fast food continues to be the domain of take-out or order-in, with less fast food prepared from frozen or eaten in a restaurant.

Eight in ten (81%) of those who claim they had at least one take-out/ordered-in meal during the previous 7 days, eat at least one meal that was fast food (e.g., pizza, fried chicken or



hamburgers). Almost one-in-three (30%) of these individuals had two or more fast food meals in the previous week.

In contrast, 43% of those who report eating in a restaurant during the past 7 day claim to have eaten fast food in a restaurant. Similarly, 40% of “reheaters” have eaten a frozen reheated fast food meal in the past 7 days.

- Regionally, fewer Canadians living in British Columbia are eating fast food in restaurants or take-out/ordered in (72% and 31% respectively) than anywhere else in Canada. However, the proportion eating between three and seven fast food meals (heavy users) was the same for British Columbia as elsewhere, suggesting that other regions simply have more occasional fast food users but similar levels of heavy users.
- Fast Food restaurants continue to appeal more to younger Canadians, and to those with more limited incomes. One-in-three (35%) younger Canadians had two or more take-outs/ordered in fast food meals during the past 7 days, compared to 11% of older Canadians.
- One-half of Canadians from low income households ate a fast food meal at a restaurant (50%) or reheated a prepared frozen meal (50%), compared to 36% and 37% respectively of Canadians living in high income households.

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