

Snapshot of Canadians' Eating Habits Reveals Many Not Eating Well

Majority of Canadians Not Getting Enough of the Four Food Groups

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Toronto, ON – A majority of Canadians may not be getting enough milk and alternatives, vegetables and fruit in their diet, according to a new Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of the Dairy Farmers of Canada, in partnership with Dietitians of Canada. But the deficiency is not related solely to those foods and extends to all four food groups.

In the survey conducted between August 5 and 7, Ipsos Reid asked over 2,000 Canadians to recall what and how much they ate or drank for each meal and snack “yesterday”. Registered Dietitians of the Dairy Farmers of Canada then tabulated the results, and have found that most Canadians are not meeting the recommendations of *Eating Well with Canada Food Guide*.

Those adults identified in this survey as not meeting the recommendations reported that they consumed less than the minimum number of servings recommended in the Food Guide for their gender and age. (see figure 1)

Figure 1: Recommended Number of Food Guide Servings per Day.

Food Group	Adults aged 19-50		Adults aged 51+	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Milk and Alternatives	2	2	3	3
Vegetables and Fruit	7-8	8-10	7	7
Meat and Alternatives	2	3	2	3
Grain Products	6-7	8	6	7

Source: Canada's Food Guide

The snapshot of Canadians' one-day food intake found that over three quarters of younger adults aged 19-50 (79% of men and 76% of women) and nine in ten older adults aged 51+ (92% of men and 91% of women) did not consume enough **milk and alternatives**, with the average consumption being a mere 0.8 servings for younger adults and 0.9 for older adults. In fact, four in ten (38%) Canadians overall, and close to half of all men aged 19-50 (48%), say they did not consume any milk or alternatives when asked to spell out every meal, snack and beverage they consumed "yesterday".

Further, these Canadians were substantially deficient in their consumption of **vegetables and fruit**: 89% of older adult men and 88% of older adult women (aged 51+), and 91% of younger adult men and women (aged 19-50) did not eat the daily recommended amount. On average younger men and women reported consumption of 2.4 and 2.5 servings respectively, while older men ate 2.8 servings and older women consumed 3.4 servings. One quarter (23%) of all Canadians surveyed did not consume any vegetables or fruit in their account of "yesterday's" meals and snacks.

When it comes to intake of **meat and alternatives**, these Canadians performed marginally better. However, the majority of adult men aged 19-50 (72%) and 51+ (68%) and half of adult

women aged 19-50 (54%) and 51+ (46%) did not consume the recommended number of servings, with an average of 1.8 servings and 1.5 for men and women respectively; one quarter (25%) consumed no meat or alternatives.

Turning to **grain** products the results are no better; 85% of women and 93% of men (aged 19-50) and 89% of older men and 88% of older women (aged 51+) reportedly not getting enough in “yesterday’s” meals for the day, compared to the Food Guide’s recommendations. The average number of servings consumed was 3.1, with 15% consuming no grain products.

Barriers to Meeting Food Guide Recommendations...

While most Canadians surveyed are not meeting the Food Guide’s recommendations, a majority say they don’t have any barriers to eating the recommended number of servings of meat and alternatives (61%), milk and alternatives (56%) and grain products (54%). Four in ten (44%) say they don’t have any barriers to eating enough vegetables and fruit.

The results of this survey suggest that a potentially large number of Canadians are coming up short in their intake of all four food groups and that eating habits are not improving when compared with the results of a more comprehensive national analysis of Canadians’ eating habits conducted through the Canadian Community Health Survey in 2004. As the majority of respondents in the Ipsos-Reid survey indicated that they don’t have any barriers to improving their eating habits with respect to milk and alternatives and grain products, these data suggest that more Canadians could meet the Food Guide requirements for these food groups if they put their mind to it.

Many Canadians, however, do identify barriers. Focusing on **milk and alternatives**, barriers include not wanting the hassle of worrying about what they’re consuming (9%), having a medical condition (8%), not having the time (7%) or money (6%) to eat properly, not knowing

what a serving size is (5%) and not knowing what the Food Guide recommendations are (5%).

Relating to **vegetables and fruit**, the primary barrier was the perceived expense of eating properly (17%), followed by hassle (16%), lack of time (15%), confusion about serving size (11%) and recommendations (11%), or having a medical condition (5%).

For **grain products**, the leading barrier was the perceived hassle of worrying about what one eats (11%), followed by time constraints (9%), confusion over serving sizes (9%) or the recommendations (7%), saying it's too expensive to eat properly (9%) or having a medical condition (5%) .

For **meat and alternatives**, the leading deterrent was the perceived cost of eating properly (10%), followed by time constraints (9%), hassle (9%), confusion over serving sizes (7%) and recommendations (5%), or a having a medical condition (5%).

For every food group, a small proportion (roughly 3%) of Canadians surveyed, indicated that they simply don't know how to eat properly, and that this is the barrier to them consuming the recommended amount of these food groups. That proportion may represent roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million Canadians who say they don't know how to eat properly.

The Benefits of Milk, Fruit and Vegetables...

Many Canadians surveyed indicated, unaided, that the perceived benefit of **milk and milk products** is as a source of calcium (42%) and that it strengthens bones (41%). On the other hand, fewer Canadians mentioned that this food group contains Vitamin D (19%), that it's good for teeth (17%), that it helps to prevent osteoporosis (4%) or that it contains healthy fat (2%) among other benefits. Further, only 15% explicitly linked calcium with stronger bones,

and fewer made the connection to teeth (5%). So while the presence of calcium and its role in building strong bones is relatively well known, Canadians are unaware of many other benefits of milk and milk products including reduction in the risk of colon cancer and hypertension.

A majority of Canadians surveyed (53%) could list, unaided, that a benefit of **fruit and vegetables** is that they contain vitamins. But fewer respondents could identify that this food group also contains fibre (26%), minerals (18%), antioxidants (11%), aids digestion (10%), helps to prevent cancer (6%), provides energy (4%), and that they're good for the eyes (4%) among other benefits. So we need to be careful that the factum does not suggest these are the benefits that we provided, rather these are ones that consumers mentioned.

But once respondents were informed of the benefits that these food groups provide, it appears that many were motivated to consume more of these products. Upon hearing more benefits, two in three (63%) survey participants indicated that they were 'likely' (25% very/39% somewhat) to increase their intake of **milk and alternatives**, and three quarters (76%) said they were 'likely' (33% very/43% somewhat) to increase their consumption of **fruit and vegetables**.

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos Reid poll conducted between August 5 and 7, 2009, on behalf of The Dairy Farmers of Canada and Dietitians of Canada. For this survey, a national sample of 2,292 adults aged 18 and older from Ipsos' Canadian online panel was interviewed online. Weighting was then employed to balance demographics and ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to Census data and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. A survey with an unweighted probability sample of this size and a 100% response rate would have an estimated margin of error of +/-2.1 percentage points 19 times out of 20 of what the results



would have been had the entire adult population been polled. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

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