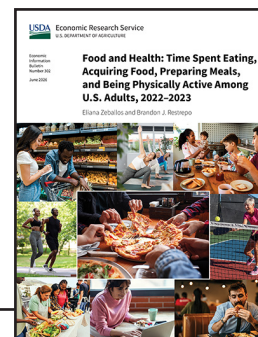




A report summary from the Economic Research Service

Food and Health: Time Spent Eating, Acquiring Food, Preparing Meals, and Being Physically Active Among U.S. Adults, 2022–2023

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Key Points

- On an average day, U.S. adults spent 67.5 minutes eating as a primary activity and 16.4 minutes eating while multitasking.
- The time spent on primary eating and drinking decreased by 5 percent from 2006–2008 to 2014–2016 and then increased by 5 percent from 2014–2016 to 2022–2023.
- A larger share of total time spent on primary eating and drinking now occurs at home, increasing from 64.6 percent in 2006–2008 to 74.4 percent in 2022–2023.
- Prepared food consumption and grocery shopping patterns vary across demographic and health groups, including sex, income, household type, and self-assessed diet quality and health status.
- Nearly 90 percent of adults reported some responsibility for grocery shopping, but women were almost twice as likely as men to be fully responsible.
- Adults reported purchasing prepared, ready-to-eat food 2.2 times per week, with adults with higher obesity risk more commonly purchasing these meals.
- Nearly two-thirds of adults (64.1 percent) engaged in physical activity at least once during the past week. Physical activity was more frequent and vigorous among adults with a healthy body mass index (BMI) and higher self-assessed diet quality and health status. Among adults surveyed, 17.3 percent reported all their physical activity was vigorous.

Why Does This Matter?

Time is a finite resource. How adults allocate time to eating, food-related tasks like grocery shopping and meal preparation, and physical activity offers relevant insights into their diet- and health-related behaviors and outcomes. This report explores how factors such as age, income, sex, employment status, health characteristics, and family structure influence what, where, and how people eat, shop, cook, and move. These behaviors, in turn, may shape diet quality and chronic disease risk. Adults with less discretionary time tend to spend less time preparing meals at home and more time consuming prepared, ready-to-eat foods, which on average are

higher in calories, sodium, saturated fats, added sugars, and refined grains. Time constraints may also reduce opportunities for physical activity and increase the likelihood of eating while multitasking, a behavior associated with lower diet quality and reduced awareness or memory of food intake. By identifying these behavioral patterns and differences, the report provides an evidence base to inform policies and programs that could improve access to nutritious foods, support meal preparation practices, and promote opportunities for physical activity—especially for time- and resource-constrained populations.

A Few More Details

This report provides updated, nationally representative descriptive estimates of U.S. adults' eating patterns and food- and health-related activities, using the 2022–2023 Eating and Health Module (EHM) supplement to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey (ATUS).

The EHM was first fielded in 2006–2008, again in 2014–2016, and the latest round in 2022–2023. This report analyzes pooled data from the 2022–2023 EHM, which provides nationally representative estimates for an average day over this period. For time spent eating and drinking, which is consistently measured across EHM rounds, we also compare findings with pooled data from the two earlier EHM rounds (2006–2008 and 2014–2016) to examine changes over time. We pool data across 2 consecutive years for the 2022–2023 EHM and 3 consecutive years for the previous EHM rounds (2006–2008 and 2014–2016) to increase the precision and therefore detect more statistically significant differences between groups. All information was self-reported by respondents. EHM survey-sampling weights were used in all analyses to produce nationally representative estimates. Statistically significant differences between populations of interest and their time-use patterns are discussed in this report.

Additional findings from this report include:

On average, adults spent 67.5 minutes daily on eating as a main activity and 16.4 minutes daily on eating while multitasking. The most common primary activities while eating were working or watching television and movies.

- Older adults and non-employed individuals were among the groups who spent the most time eating as a main activity and the least time eating while multitasking.
- Single parents and adults aged 25–54 were among the groups who spent the least amount of time eating as a main activity and while at home.

Adults purchased prepared, ready-to-eat food from a grocery store deli department, restaurant, fast food place, or other type of food establishment (including takeout and delivery) an average of 2.2 times per week.

- Just over one-third of adults (36.8 percent) consumed prepared, ready-to-eat food the day before their survey interview.
- Prepared food purchases and consumption were more common among adults with higher-risk obesity (BMI of 35 and above) and poor or fair self-assessed diets.

Grocery shopping varies by sex, income, and household type.

- Almost 9 in 10 adults (88.4 percent) reported some responsibility for grocery shopping in their household.
- Nearly twice as many women than men were fully responsible for grocery shopping.
- Adults living in households that receive USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits most often cited location and price as their main reasons for purchasing the majority of their in-person groceries.
- About 1 in 5 adults (19.5 percent) shopped online with higher rates among those who were younger, women, and parents.

Meal preparation and home cooking vary by self-assessed diet quality and health status.

- The vast majority of adults (90.1 percent) prepared meals; among those who did, 39.5 percent reported enjoying preparing meals “a lot.”
- Adults who were responsible for and enjoyed meal preparation had higher self-assessed health status and diet quality.
- More women than men reported being fully responsible for meal preparation in their households (43.4 percent for women and 22.3 percent for men). A slightly higher share of men reported enjoying meal preparation at least “a little” (93.2 percent for men compared with 91.6 percent for women).

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