



Adult Eating and Health Patterns: Evidence From the 2014-16 Eating & Health Module of the American Time Use Survey

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What Is the Issue?

Understanding how individuals and households allocate time to food-related activities can provide insight into behaviors associated with nutrition and diet-related health. Coupling an analysis of the overall eating patterns of the American population with an analysis of the eating patterns of specific subpopulations can explain why nutrition and diet-related health outcomes vary over time and across demographic subgroups. These analyses can also inform programs and policies targeted at improving nutrition and reducing the prevalence of obesity and other diet-related diseases.

To gather information on Americans' eating and health patterns, ERS developed—along with USDA's Food and Nutrition Service and the National Cancer Institute—the Eating & Health Module (EHM) supplement to the Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey (ATUS). This report presents statistics from the EHM for an average day over 2014-16 for the adult population as a whole and for a wide variety of demographic subgroups and examines whether and how select behaviors have changed since 2006-08.

What Did the Study Find?

- Americans age 18 and older spent about 65 minutes per day eating and drinking as a primary activity and 17 minutes eating as a secondary activity.
 - Time spent in primary eating and drinking for adults decreased by 5 percent from 2006-08 to 2014-16; however, time spent in secondary eating did not significantly change.
 - Seniors (age 65 and older) spent 20 percent more time eating and drinking as a primary activity than younger individuals but 23 percent less time eating as a secondary activity.
 - Adults with more than a bachelor's degree spent 18 percent more time eating and drinking as a primary activity and 18 percent more time eating as a secondary activity.

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- Nearly 6 in 10 adults reported purchasing prepared food from a deli, carry-out, delivery food, or fast food at some point during the week before their interview.
 - Of individuals in households that received USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits in the past month, about 43 percent purchased prepared food during the previous week, significantly fewer than the 50 percent of those in low-income households that did not receive SNAP benefits.

How Was the Study Conducted?

The EHM was fielded over two 3-year periods, 2006-08 and 2014-16. This report analyzes data from both the pooled 2006-08 and pooled 2014-16 EHM data. The 2006-08 (2014-16) EHM survey effort resulted in approximately 36,000 (31,000) completed interviews of individuals age 18 and older. All information was self-reported by respondents. EHM survey sampling weights were used in all analyses to produce nationally representative estimates. Differences between variables that are discussed in this report are significant at the 90-percent level of confidence.