



What Do Canadians Do About Nutrition?

We have limited information about what Canadians eat. Provincial nutrition surveys were carried out during the 1990s and provide valuable important information on dietary intakes of Canadian adults. However, these data were collected over a ten-year period, one province at a time, making it difficult to describe a current, national picture of Canadian eating habits. To date Nova Scotia, Québec and Saskatchewan have published reports on dietary intake patterns in their provinces. In addition, Statistics Canada provides insights into broad shifts in the Canadian food supply through analysis of the food available for consumption in Canada, released in semi-annual reports called *Food Consumption in Canada* (<http://www.statcan.ca/english/ads/23F0001XCB/highlight.htm>).

Published reports from a small variety of consumer surveys do provide valuable insights into eating behaviours of Canadians. Some of these insights are presented here.

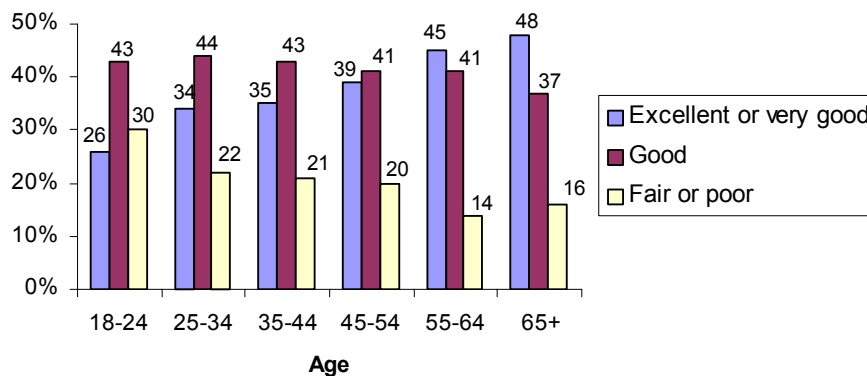
How Canadians Rate Their Eating Habits

According to the National Institute of Nutrition’s 2001 Tracking Nutrition Trends survey, 38% of adult Canadians rated their eating habits as “very good” or “excellent”, 42% as “good” and 21% as “fair or poor”. Of those who assessed their eating habits as “good”, “very good” or “excellent”, some 96% also reported making an effort to eat well, and 64% say they have made some changes to their eating habits over the past year.

Eating Habits and Age

Canadians age 55 to 64 and Canadians over the age of 65 rated their eating habits more favourably than did their younger counterparts. Only 14% and 16% of these age groups respectively, rated their eating habits as “fair or poor”, compared to 30% for those ages 18 to 24 and 20% of those aged 45 to 54 years.

How Canadians Rate Their Eating Habits by Age



Source: National Institute of Nutrition, 2002

Eating Habits and Gender

More women (41%) than men (35%) reported that they feel their eating habits are “very good” or “excellent”. For both men and

women, 42% reported their eating habits as “good”. Only 17% of women rated themselves as having “fair or poor” eating habits as compared with 24% of men.

What Influences Eating Habits Among Canadians?

According to the 2001 Tracking Nutrition Trends survey, nine in ten (92%) Canadians indicated making an effort to eat well. Almost two-thirds (62%) of Canadians reported that have made some changes over the past year to improve their eating habits. Changes identified most frequently included reducing fat intake (34%), increasing vegetable and fruit consumption (26%), and reducing sugar intake (14%). Generally, Canadians who rated their eating habits as “excellent” (6%), “very good” (32%) or “good” (42%), reported that they try to eat a “balanced diet” (25%), watch “what they eat” (23%) and “eat fruits and vegetables” (16%).

When asked about “key motivators” to change or improve their eating habits, responses provided included “to maintain personal health” (58%), “to lose weight” (22%), “to accommodate the needs of family members” (10%), “to prevent disease” (8%) and “to look better” (8%). The relative importance of each of these factors, however, differed according to age, with responses related “looking better” being more prevalent among adults under the age of 25 (17%) and responses related to

“maintaining health” and “preventing disease” being more prevalent among those over the age of 45.

According to the National Institute of Nutrition’s 2001 Tracking Nutrition Trends survey, the majority of Canadians surveyed cite “health maintenance” as the key consideration when selecting foods. More women (74%) than men (64%) consider health maintenance to be very influential for their decision on food choices. For almost three-quarters (72%) of Canadians, “weight management” and “weight loss” were identified as “very” or “somewhat” influential.

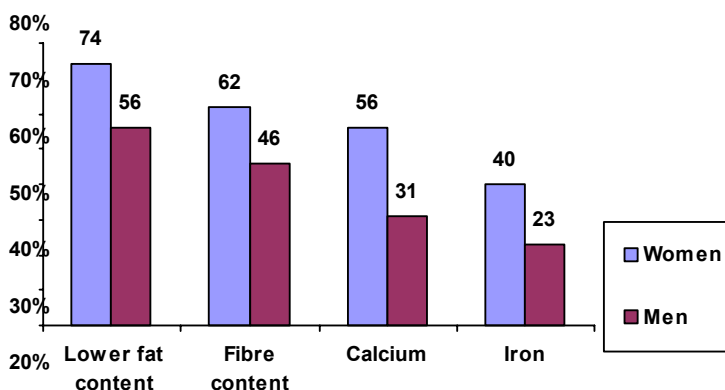
In addition, time appears to be a significant influence on Canadians’ eating habits. According to the Food and Consumer Manufacturers of Canada’s 1999 Consumerline Survey, Canadians are increasingly feeling more pressed for time. More than two-thirds of Canadians (68%) reported they are short of time. And while many Canadians understand the importance of healthy eating, approximately 13% don’t feel they have enough time to prepare nutritious meals. Almost three-quarters of employed Canadians (74%) and over half of homemakers (56%) reported that they eat their meals in a hurry.

What Influences Canadians to Choose or Avoid Certain Foods?

Results from the 1998/99 National Population Health Survey (NPHS) also indicate that the single biggest reason reported for avoiding or choosing certain foods for both women (80%) and men (63%) is “maintaining or improving health”. According to this survey, fifty-nine percent of women reported that they are concerned about their weight, as are 41% of men. Also on our minds when choosing or avoiding foods is heart disease (48% of

women and 38% of men) and osteoporosis (42% of women and 15% of men). One-third of women (33%) and one-quarter of men (23%) said that they take cancer into consideration when choosing foods, and 26% of women and 20% of men report that they consider diabetes as a factor. Nutrition factors, such as nutrient and calorie content of foods, also play a part in what Canadians - especially women - choose to eat.

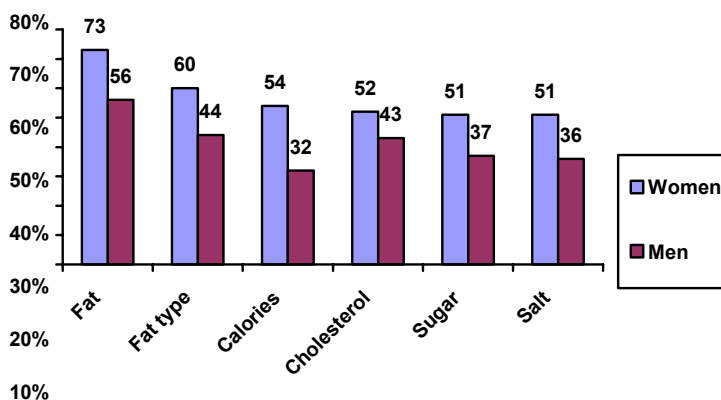
Nutrition Influences on the Foods We Choose



Nutrition Influences

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, Health Reports
(Data source: National Population Health Survey, household component, 1998/99).

Nutrition Influences on the Foods We Avoid



Nutrition Influences

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, Health Reports
(Data source: National Population Health Survey, household component, 1998/99).

In the 2001 Tracking Nutrition Trends Survey, Canadians were asked about the degree to which several product claims may influence their choice of food. Statements about **added vitamins and/ or minerals** were cited as influential (“very” or “somewhat”) for nearly two thirds of consumers (65%). Claims regarding **sugar-**

free and **light** products were considered influential to almost six in ten (58%) Canadians, especially women and primary grocery shoppers. Products labelled as **organic** and **source of omega 3** claims tend to appeal to consumers aged 35 to 64 years of age.

References

- Food and Consumer Products Manufacturers of Canada, Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors, Canadian Living and Arthur Andersen. Health, Time and Shopping: The Balancing Act. *The 1999 Consumerline Survey*.
- National Institute of Nutrition. (2002) *Tracking Nutrition Trends. An Update on Canadians' Nutrition-Related Attitudes, Knowledge and Actions, 2001*
- Statistics Canada. (2001). How Healthy Are Canadians? *Health Reports* 12(3):11-20.