

Consumer Trends: American Adults Are Eating Healthier

WASHINGTON (USDA) — American adults are eating better, making better use of available nutrition information, and consuming fewer calories coming from fat and saturated fat, consuming less cholesterol and eating more fiber, according to a new report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service: [Changes in Eating Patterns and Diet Quality Among Working-Age Adults, 2005-2010](#) [1].

The study, released today, underscores the importance of robust efforts undertaken since 2009 to improve food choices and diet quality and ensure that all Americans have access to healthy food and science-based nutrition education and advice.

"The Obama Administration is working hard to empower the American public to make smart choices every day at school, at home and in their communities," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "We have made significant progress, but our work is not done. We will continue to invest in critical programs that expand the availability of healthy, safe, affordable food for all Americans."

The researchers found that use of nutrition information, including the Nutrition Facts Panel found on most food packages, increased in recent years. Forty-two percent of working age adults and 57 percent of older adults reported using the Nutrition Facts Panel most or all of the time when making food choices. When asked about nutrition information in restaurants, 76 percent of working-age adults reported that they would use the information if it were available.

"We are pleased to hear that this study finds improvements in several key areas of the American diet," said Michael R. Taylor, deputy commissioner for foods and veterinary medicine at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. "FDA will soon propose an updated Nutrition Facts label designed to provide information that will make it even easier for people to make healthy choices."

Reduced consumption of food away from home (such as food from restaurants and fast food) accounted for 20 percent of the improvements in diet quality. A recent study found that during the recession of 2007-2009, U.S. household overall food expenditures declined approximately 5 percent, mostly due to a 12.9 percent decline in spending on food away from home. Calories consumed through food away from home dropped by 127 calories per day, and the average person ate three fewer meals and 1.5 fewer snacks per month away from home. Eating at home more often was also associated with more frequent family meals.

The report also indicates changing attitudes toward food and nutrition. Compared with 2007, the percentage of working-age adults who believed they have the ability to change their body weight increased by three percentage points in 2010. During

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the same time period, the report shows there was little change in the importance that price played when making choices at the grocery store, but working-age adults placed increased importance on nutrition when choosing items to purchase.

"When individuals believe that their actions directly affect their body weight, they might be more inclined to make healthier food choices," said study author Jessica Todd, Ph.D., of the Economic Research Service.

The researcher used individual dietary intake data for working-age adults from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), which collects detailed individual and household information on a wide range of health-related topics through questionnaires, physical exams and lab work, in two-year segments. The survey is designed to be nationally representative, with a sample composed of 9,839 individuals. Overall, daily caloric intake declined by 78 calories per day between 2005 and 2010. There were overall declines in calories from total fat (3.3 percent), saturated fat (5.9 percent), and intake of cholesterol (7.9 percent). Overall fiber intake increased by 1.2 grams per day (7.5 percent).

This research was conducted by the Economic Research Service, which is a primary source of economic information and research at USDA.

Expanding the availability of healthy food to all Americans, while providing science-based nutrition information and advice, is a key focus of USDA's nutrition assistance programs and the Obama Administration. USDA is focused on strategies that empower families to make healthy food choices, including:

- USDA's MyPlate symbol and the resources at [ChooseMyPlate](#) [2] provide quick, easy reference tools to facilitate healthy eating on a budget for parents, teachers, healthcare professionals and communities. The site includes shopping strategies and meal planning advice to help families serve more nutritious meals affordably through its [10-Tips Nutrition Series](#) [3] and the [Thrifty Food Plan](#) [4].
- USDA's [SuperTracker](#) [5], a free online planning and tracking tool, helps more than three million Americans improve food choices, maintain a healthy weight, and track physical activity on a daily basis.
- America's students now have healthier and more nutritious school meals due to improved nutrition standards implemented as a result of the historic [Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010](#) [6]. USDA recently announced [Smart Snacks in Schools](#) [7], which sets healthy guidelines for all foods and beverages sold in school to ensure that students will be offered only healthier food options during the school day.
- USDA [expanded eligibility](#) [8] for \$4 million in grants to improve access to fresh produce and healthy foods for SNAP shoppers at America's farmers markets. By increasing the number of farmers markets that are able to accept SNAP benefits, USDA is encouraging SNAP recipients to use their benefits to purchase and prepare healthy foods for their families.
- Through USDA's [Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food](#) [9], the department has worked to increase access to nutritious food through the development of

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strong local and regional food systems. The number of farmers markets increased by more than 67 percent in the last four years and there are now more than 220 regional food hubs in operation around the country.

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[1] <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err161.aspx>

[2] <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>

[3] <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/healthy-eating-tips/ten-tips.html>

[4] <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/usdafoodplanscostoffood.htm>

[5] <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/supertracker-tools/supertracker.html>

[6] http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/legislation/CNR_2010.htm

[7] <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pressrelease/2013/013413>

[8] <http://blogs.usda.gov/2013/05/03/snap-new-rules-aim-to-expand-access-to-farmers%E2%80%99-markets/>

[9]

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