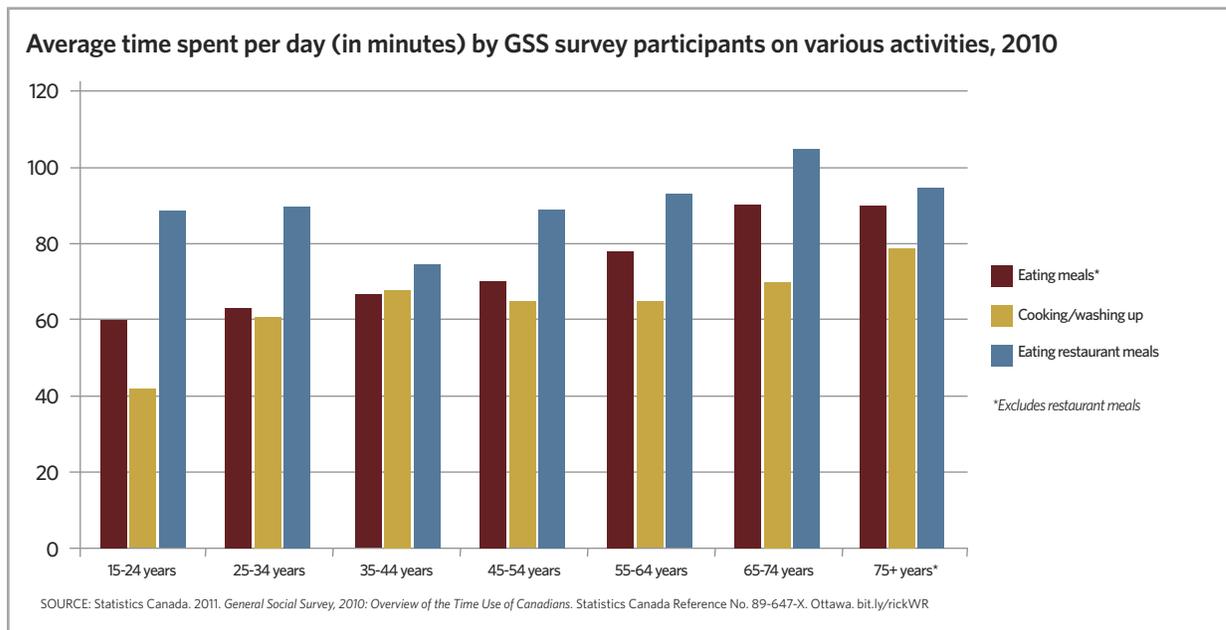


FASCINATING FAMILIES

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Time to Eat? Eating Patterns of Canadians



You are what you eat," as the saying goes, and one can indeed learn a lot about people by looking at what they eat. However, much can also be revealed by examining *how* and *where* we acquire, prepare and consume our food – i.e., our eating patterns. With one in five surveyed Canadians aged 20-64 reporting "high time pressure" in 2010¹ and portable, ready-to-eat foods readily available, mealtime can seem more of an inconvenience than an important social activity that benefits our health and well-being. By examining the eating patterns of Canadians, we can gain insight into our ever-changing lifestyles and its effect on families and family life.

According to the 2010 GSS Survey, Canadians devote 1/4 of their daily time awake to food-related activities (eating meals, restaurant meals, cooking/washing up): women and men reported spending 3.9 and 3.5 hours, respectively, participating in these activities in 2010.² While women and men of

all age groups reported little difference in the time spent daily eating meals (70 vs. 73 minutes, respectively), women spent on average 24 minutes longer than men cooking and washing up (74 vs. 50 minutes, respectively).³

Our busy lifestyles often affect how we eat, with Canadians of all ages snacking and skipping meals in an effort to work their dietary needs into their schedules. According to a recent national consumer survey, 1/4 of all meals in Canada consisted of portable foods or beverages meant to be eaten between meals (i.e., "snack foods").⁴ Meal-skipping is common among youth (particularly among girls), and it increases throughout the teenage years. Among 11 year old Canadians, 75% of boys and 69% of girls reported eating breakfast every school day – rates that dropped to 59% and 46%, respectively, for 15 year olds.⁵

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The daily rush can affect both parents and children: 1/4 of surveyed Canadian moms say they're "too rushed" to prepare breakfast for their children every morning before school.⁶

Among workers, lunch is a frequently neglected meal, with 28% of surveyed North American workers reporting that they "seldom, if ever" take lunch breaks.⁷ In the same survey, 4 in 10 respondents said that they take lunch breaks, but remain at their desks while they eat, away from others.⁸

Even dinner time isn't free from the pressures of the time crunch, with most (55%) surveyed Canadians reporting that all of their dinners were prepared in 15 minutes or less.⁹ When surveyed, Canadian parents cited "work schedules" (68%) and "demands from children's after school activities" (34%) as key obstacles to their family dinner preparation.¹⁰ However, despite the challenges involved in providing regular family meals, Canadian students in Grades 6 to 10 reported eating an average of 4.7 family meals together per week in 2010.¹¹

Family Lens

Eating is not simply a process of refuelling, but can also be an activity essential to our well-being where we socialize children, communicate and connect with family members. Mealtimes provide people with more than just nutrients, but also opportunities for healthy social interaction and relaxation with people we care about. Research has also shown that family mealtimes can benefit children's mental health and life satisfaction,¹² assist in literacy development¹³ and even reduce the risk of substance use.¹⁴

Family meals have many benefits, but they can be a difficult thing to fit into our busy schedules. Every day, Canadians face the challenge of fulfilling our multiple roles as parents, children, grandparents, caretakers, workers and students. Not long ago, we grew our own food, prepared meals and preserved the harvest – now we go to grocery stores and markets instead. The one thing that hasn't changed is that there are only 24 hours in a day. As our lives become more complex and the pace of life continues to accelerate, it becomes increasingly important that we include family meals in our agendas.

¹ Canadian Index of Wellbeing (2012). *How are Canadians Really Doing? The 2012 CIW Report*. (Waterloo, ON: Canadian Index of Wellbeing and University of Waterloo). Accessed March 1, 2013. <http://bit.ly/VbdLvf>

² Statistics Canada (2011). *General Social Survey, 2010: Overview of the Time Use of Canadians*. Statistics Canada Reference No. 89-647-X. Ottawa. Accessed February 13, 2013. <http://bit.ly/rickWR>

³ Ibid.

⁴ NPD Group (2010). "Snacking in Canada," in *Consumer Corner* (Issue 15, September 2011). Accessed March 2, 2013. <http://bit.ly/YzWzOz>

⁵ Currie C et al., eds. "Social Determinants of Health and Well-Being Among Young People," from *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study: International Report from the 2009/2010 Survey*. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2012 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 6), p.107. Accessed March 18, 2013. <http://bit.ly/Jo8kxu>

⁶ Ipsos. *Canada's Breakfast Report: Exploring Canadian Breakfast Knowledge, Habits and Challenges* (2012 survey). Accessed March 1, 2013. <http://bit.ly/XuK0ES>

⁷ Right Management (2012). "Just One-in-Five Employees Take Actual Lunch Break," (2012 survey). Accessed February 27, 2013. <http://bit.ly/RDORUt>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ NPD Group (2011). "Eating Pattern Recession - Part 3," in *Consumer Corner* (Issue 13, April 2011). Accessed March 6, 2013. <http://bit.ly/15iZfTz>

¹⁰ Vision Critical. *Families Who Eat Dinner Together More Often Say they Make Healthier Food Choices* (2013 survey). Accessed March 1, 2013. <http://bit.ly/YgGcG5>

¹¹ Elgar, Frank J., Craig, Wendy and Trites, Stephen J. "Family Dinners, Communication, and Mental Health in Canadian Adolescents," in *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2012;v52(4):433-438. Accessed March 14, 2013. <http://bit.ly/ZCIN0N>

¹² Elgar et al.

¹³ Snow, Catherine E. and Beals, Diane E. "Mealtime Talk that Supports Literacy Development," in *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*. 2006; (111):51-66. Accessed February 27, 2013. <http://bit.ly/12pM81S>

¹⁴ Eisenberg et al. "Family Meals and Substance Use: Is There a Long-Term Protective Association?" in *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2008; 43(2):151-156. Accessed March 6, 2013. <http://bit.ly/Y2swhc>

