

NATIONWIDE FOOD CONSUMPTION SURVEY

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Food consumption information has been collected by the Department of Agriculture since 1936, using concepts developed around the turn of the century. Modern sampling methods and statistical procedures have enabled the most recent nationwide food consumption survey to be the largest in scope with 30,000 households participating in either the basic or supplemental surveys. Two kinds of information were collected--consumption of food by households for a week and food actually eaten by individual members over a 3-day period. Data presently available are preliminary, spring 1977 data for households and individuals.

Households spent 24 cents of every food dollar on meals and snacks away from home in 1977 compared with 17 cents of the dollar in 1965. Regardless of the household income level the money value of food used at home averaged between \$14 and \$16 per person per week in 1977. However, 9 percent of the lowest-income level households responded that sometimes or often they did not have enough to eat. Households allocated more than one-third of their food dollar to meat, poultry, and fish. More was also spent on fruit and particularly soft drinks, punches, and prepared desserts; less was spent for eggs, fats and oils, sugar, syrup, jelly, and candy.

Data reflecting the nutrient content of the food Americans consumed at home show that, on the average, food energy or calories available declined about 10 percent since 1965. Levels of all vitamins and iron except calcium were similar to or were higher than those found in 1965. Since food energy decreased as the amount of vitamin and iron in food used by households increased, food used in 1977 had a higher nutrient density than in 1965. In general, households at different income levels in 1977 used foods which were more similar in nutrient content than was the case in 1965.

Among groups of individuals, caloric consumption of younger people declined more than that of older members of the population. Teenage boys and girls had the highest average caloric intakes in 1977, but 250-300 calories less than in 1965. Generally intakes of the three main energy-producing nutrients--protein, fat, and carbohydrate--decreased between 1965 and 1977. The reduced quantities of protein were more than adequate though to meet the 1974 RDA for all sex-age groups. Although the percentage of calories derived from fat was down for all sex-age groups, infants were the only group to meet recommendations of the American Heart Association calling for less than 35 percent of energy in the diet coming from fat.

When the average nutrient intakes of the various sex-age groups are compared with the appropriate 1974 RDA's, only a few appear not to meet recommended levels, for such nutrients as calcium and vitamin B₆. Iron intakes remain a problem for females between 12 and 50 years of age. Changes in RDA are responsible for some of the apparent improvement but increased fortification in foods and changes in foods consumed also contributed to the improvement.