



ERS *Report Summary*

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of an ERS report.

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How Much Time Do Americans Spend on Food?

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The American Time Use Survey's Eating & Health Module, developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (ERS), collects data on Americans' time use patterns and eating, Body Mass Index (BMI), USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamp Program, FSP) participation, meals obtained at school, and grocery shopping over 2006-08. In this report, we present extensive summary statistics and analysis using these data for an average day over the 2006-08 period. Single-year estimates of food-related time use patterns have previously been analyzed. However, by studying 3 years of data together, we are able to examine in greater detail various subgroups of the population.

Information on the time Americans spend in various activities, and in particular food-related activities, may provide some insight into why nutrition and health outcomes vary over time and across different segments of the population. A better understanding of these factors could improve programs and policies targeted at reducing obesity and improving overall nutrition.

What Did the Study Find?

We looked at time use patterns for Americans age 15 and over and estimated time spent in eating activities. We also analyzed time use patterns by BMI, general health, SNAP participation, as well as by other characteristics. Our findings include the following (all reported differences are statistically significant at the 90-percent confidence level):

- On an average day over 2006-08, Americans age 15 and older spent about 2.5 hours eating or drinking. Slightly less than half of that time (67 minutes) was spent eating and drinking as a "primary" or main activity, while the remaining time was spent in eating and drinking while doing something else considered primary such as watching television, driving, preparing meals, and/or working (78 minutes) and in waiting to eat and/or traveling to the meal destination (7 minutes). Eleven percent of the population spent at least 4.5 hours on an average day engaged in eating and drinking activities.
- Lower income Americans, those with household incomes less than 185 percent of the poverty threshold, spend less time engaged in eating and drinking activities than those with higher incomes.

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- Those who engaged in secondary eating or drinking while driving, working, grooming, or during meal preparation and cleanup had lower-than-average BMIs, while those who engaged in secondary eating while watching television had higher-than-average BMIs.
- Obese individuals, on average, spent just over 3 hours watching television per day, about 37 minutes more than those with normal weight.
- Women were more likely to grocery shop than men on an average day, and spent more time shopping as well.
- Teenagers who did not obtain breakfast or lunch at school engaged in considerably more screentime (non-school computer time and watching television) than teens who do obtain meals at school.

How Was the Study Conducted?

Data for this study come from a 4-minute supplement, the Eating & Health Module (EH Module) of the American Time Use Survey (ATUS). The ATUS is a Bureau of Labor Statistics survey that is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. ERS and the National Institutes of Health's National Cancer Institute funded the EH Module, which was fielded from January 2006 to December 2008. ERS compiles, analyzes, and releases the data collected from the EH Module. Over 2006-08, the ATUS and EH Module resulted in a total of 37,832 completed interviews. Weighting factors were used in order to produce nationally representative estimates. The EH Module contains questions on:

- eating patterns;
- height, weight, and health status;
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly Food Stamp Program) participation, meals obtained at school by household children;
- household income; and
- grocery shopping and meal preparation.