



Concerns about diet and nutrition in WA, 2015

Background

The Nutrition Monitoring Survey Series has been conducted in Western Australia (WA) since 1995 to investigate knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of West Australians relating to food, nutrition and the Australian Dietary Guidelines. The surveys include assessments of dietary change as well as barriers and promoters of dietary change. The most recent survey was conducted in 2015.

The state-wide telephone survey included 1207 participants. One third (33%) of respondents were male and two thirds (67%) were female. Ages ranged from 18 to 64 years, with almost half (45%) residing in the Perth metropolitan area.

Data were weighted for sample design and probability of selection in 2015. Post survey adjustments were made to compensate for under or over representation of gender, age or areas of residence using the 2014 Estimated Resident Population for WA people aged 18 to 64 years.

Key results

Perceptions of major problems with the average Australian diet

- 'Too much fast/junk food' (49%) and 'too much sugar/sweet things' (34%) were the two most frequently perceived problems with the Australian diet. Three per cent of respondents said there were no problems with the Australian diet and 1% said they didn't know what the problems were.

Table 1. Perceived major problems with the Australian diet, NMSS 2015

Perceived problem	%
Too much fast/junk food	49
Too much sugar/sweet things	34
Too much fat/wrong sorts of fat	28
Too much processed food/additives	19
Not eating a balanced diet	14
Not enough time to eat/cook/reliance on pre-prepared food	13
Not enough fruit/veg	12
Too much alcohol	10
Too much salt	8
Buying healthy food is too expensive	6
Portions are too large	6
No problems	3
Too many sugary drinks	3
Don't know	1

Concerns about food composition and portion size

- The highest level of concern shown about food composition was about the amount of added sugar in foods and drinks, with most adults being either 'very concerned' (66%) or 'quite concerned' (21%).
- Almost three quarters of WA adults were also 'quite concerned' or 'very concerned' about the amount of fat (73%) and the amount of salt (73%) in foods.
- Two thirds of WA adults were 'very concerned' (47%) or 'quite concerned' (22%) about the increasing portion size of foods.
- Females were more likely than males to be 'quite concerned' or 'very concerned' about each of the four aspects of food composition and portion size.
- Most WA adults were 'very concerned' or 'quite concerned' about the sale of high caffeine drinks to children 12 years and younger (85%); the effect of the environment on the future of food supplies (79%); the location of fast food outlets near schools (69%); and the health effects of genetically modified foods (61%).
- Females were more likely than males to be 'very concerned' or 'quite concerned' about the sale of high caffeine drinks to children 12 years and younger (93% compared with 77%) and about the health effects of genetically modified foods (73% compared with 49%).

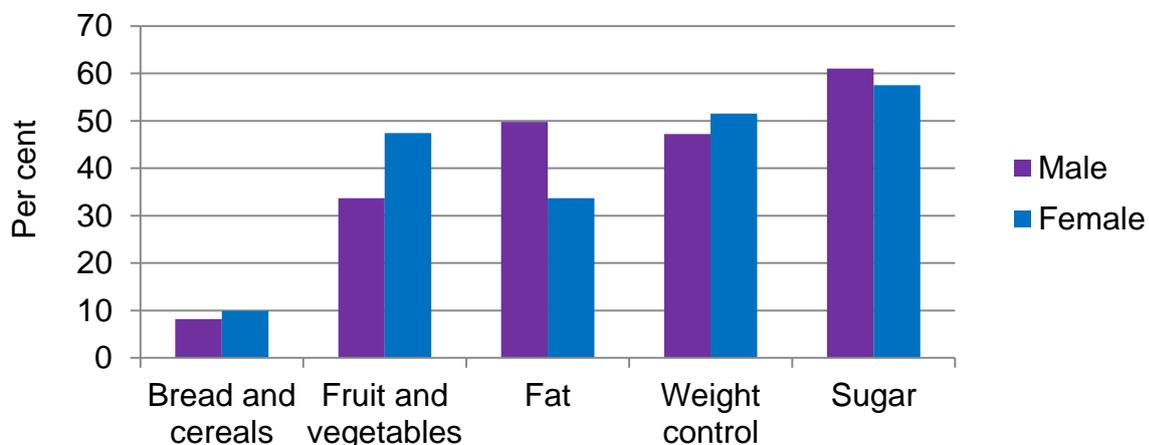
Access to healthy foods

- One third (33%) of WA adults 'agreed' and half (53%) 'strongly agreed' that a large selection of fruits and vegetables is available in their neighbourhood.
- Those aged 55 to 64 years (66%) were more likely to 'strongly agree' that a large selection of fruits and vegetables is available in their neighbourhood than those aged 35 to 44 years (51%) and 18 to 34 years (48%).
- Adults living outside the Perth metropolitan area were less likely to 'strongly agree' there is a large selection of fruits and vegetables available in their neighbourhood than those living within the Perth metropolitan area (42% compared with 56%).

Support for government community nutrition education programs

- Topics that received the most support for government community nutrition education were sugar (59%); weight control (49%); fat (42%); and fruit and vegetables (40%).
- More males than females gave priority to education about fat (50% compared with 34%).

Figure 1. **High priority topics for government community nutrition education programs by gender, NMSS 2015**



Importance of government food controls and regulations

- Most WA adults (96%) reported that they felt it was 'quite important' or 'very important' for government to regulate nutrition information on food labels.
- Most (94%) also reported that it was 'quite important' or 'very important' for government to regulate or control a health rating on food labels.
- Females were more likely than males to report that they feel it is important for government to regulate the supply of environmentally friendly foods (89% compared with 76%).

Support for government spending on nutrition activities

- Most WA adults reported that financial support from the government is 'very important' or 'quite important' for monitoring the quality of the food supply (96%); working with the food industry to increase availability of healthy foods (95%); and for research investigating 'what Western Australians are eating' and how diets are changing over time (91%).
- Females were more likely than males to rate government support of monitoring the quality of the food supply as being 'quite important' or 'very important' (99% compared with 94%).
- Most WA adults also rated government financial support as 'very important' or 'quite important' for supporting schools to provide better nutrition information and programs (97%); providing nutrition publications for the general public (89%); advertising campaigns to promote healthy eating to the public (89%); and advertising campaigns to promote healthy weight to the public (88%).

Affordability of food

- Six per cent of adults in WA reported that they or someone in their household had eaten less than they should because they couldn't afford to buy enough food in the past 12 months.
- When income was considered, those with an annual household income less than \$60,000 were more likely than those with a higher household income to have eaten less than they should because they couldn't afford enough food (18% compared with 4%).

Main sources of dietary information over the last 12 months

- The top five sources of nutrition and dietary information reported by WA adults were the Internet or websites (39%); television programs (19%); family and friends (18%); television ads (18%) and books (17%).

Food preparation skills

- Most adults (80%) indicated they had good cooking skills with 43% reporting they 'can cook a wide variety of foods' and 37% reporting they 'can cook almost anything'.
- Females were more likely than males to say they 'can cook almost anything' (46% compared with 29%).

Attention to the health aspects of foods consumed

- Most WA adults (92%) say they either pay a lot of attention to the health aspects of their food, or take a bit of notice. Only 8% of adults say they don't pay much attention.
- Females were more likely than males to pay a lot of attention to the health aspect of the food they eat (56% compared with 36%).
- Those aged 55 to 64 years were more likely to claim to pay a lot of attention to the health aspects of their food than those aged 18 to 34 years (57% compared with 39%).

Perceived enablers of healthy eating

- The top six influences that would make it easier for WA adults and their families to eat a healthy diet were detailed and easy to understand information on food labels (89%); cheaper healthy foods (87%); if all unhealthy foods had a coloured symbol on the label (85%); knowing quicker ways to prepare healthier foods (82%); being able to buy more healthy food snacks (81%); and not exposing children to advertising and promotion of unhealthy foods and drinks (81%).

Prepared by the Chronic Disease Prevention Directorate, Public and Aboriginal Health Division

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

© Department of Health 2018

Copyright to this material is vested in the State of Western Australia unless otherwise indicated. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced or re-used for any purposes whatsoever without written permission of the State of Western Australia.