

Summary Findings: 2008

American eating and drinking patterns

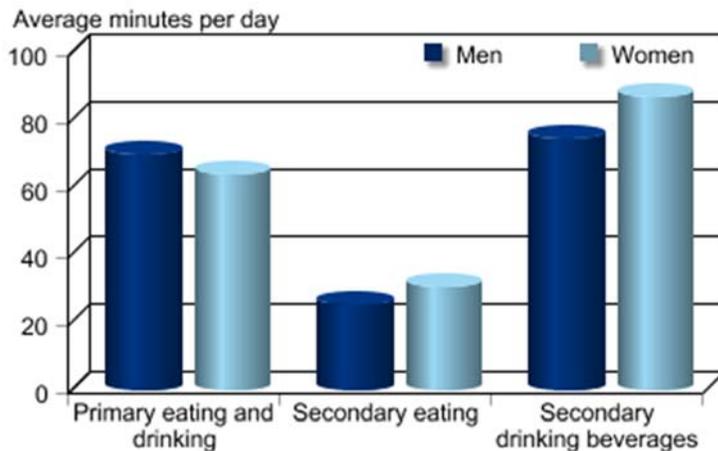
On an average day in 2008, Americans age 15 and older spent 67 minutes eating and drinking as a "primary," or main, activity, and 28 minutes eating and 81 minutes drinking (except plain water) as a secondary activity--that is, eating while engaged in another activity considered primary by the individual. Thirteen percent of the population spent 4.5 hours or more a day on eating/drinking as either a primary or secondary activity. About 14 percent of Americans' secondary eating and drinking occurred while driving a vehicle. Secondary eating or drinking was most frequently accompanied by relaxing and leisure, which includes watching television.

The year 2008 marks the first time since the American Time Use Survey has collected data (2003-08) that the economy has been in recession. Although time use patterns usually do not change much from one year to the next, the recession appears to have affected some behaviors. In 2008, Americans spent more time watching television at home, and low-income persons spent more time grocery shopping.

Time spent eating and drinking

On an average day in 2008, the total time that Americans spent on eating and drinking—both as primary and secondary activities—and on activities related to eating and drinking was about 172 minutes (2.9 hours), adjusting for overlap of secondary eating and secondary drinking. Because secondary eating and drinking activities may overlap, total time estimates are less than the sum of estimates for individual activities. All comparisons presented here are statistically significant.

In 2008, men and women spent about the same amount of time in eating and drinking activities



Note: Data for individuals, age 15 and older.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey and ERS Eating and Health Module.

Men and women spent about the same amount of time on primary and secondary eating/drinking. Four percent of the American population did not engage in any primary eating/drinking on an average day. However, this group spent more time on secondary eating or drinking than the total population--an average of 59 minutes on secondary eating and 157 minutes (2.6 hours) on secondary drinking.

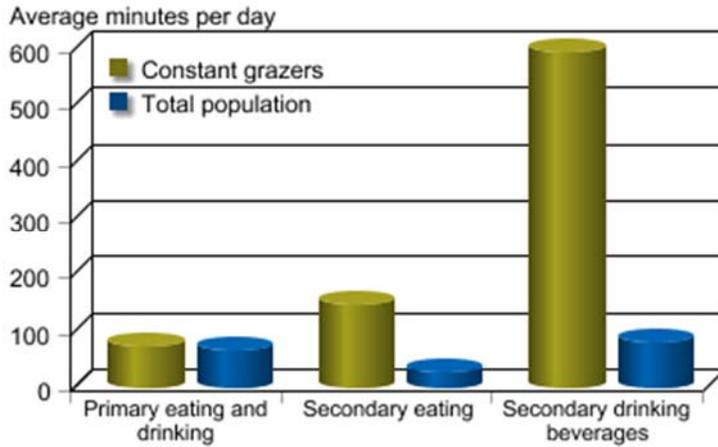
A change to the survey instrument for the Eating and Health Module resulted in increases in time spent in secondary eating and secondary drinking between the 2006 survey and the 2007 and 2008 surveys. As of October 2006, respondents could report "all day" for secondary eating or drinking, excluding time spent in primary eating and sleeping (see User's Guide). Thus, increases in secondary eating from 16 minutes in 2006 to 26 minutes in 2007 and 28 minutes in 2008 and in secondary drinking from 42 minutes in 2006 to 66 minutes in 2007 and 81 minutes in 2008 result not from behavioral changes but from changes in measurement. The percentage of people engaged in any secondary eating or secondary drinking remained fairly constant from 2006 to 2008.

In 2007 and 2008, 2 percent of those who engaged in secondary eating reported eating "all day", whereas in 2006, less than 1 percent reported "all day" snacking, representing a small, but expected increase with the survey change. However, 10 percent of those who engaged in secondary drinking reported "all day" drinking of beverages in 2007 and 15 percent in 2008, a marked increase from about 1 percent in 2006.

The median amount of time spent in secondary eating was 15 minutes in 2007 and 2008, unchanged from 2006. For secondary drinking, the median time spent increased from 35 minutes in 2006 to 45 minutes in 2007 and 60 minutes in 2008. The large increase in time spent in secondary drinking after the survey instrument change reflects measurement limitations rather than behavioral changes in time spent in secondary drinking.

"Constant grazers" are defined here as those who spend at least 4.5 hours a day (about twice the 2006 average time) on primary or secondary eating or drinking activities. This group makes up 13.0 percent of the population. Constant grazers spent the majority of eating and drinking time on secondary drinking--an average of 10 hours. About 9 percent of constant grazers reported secondary eating "all day" and 43 percent reported "all day" drinking of beverages.

Constant grazers spent about 10 hours a day in secondary drinking of beverages in 2008



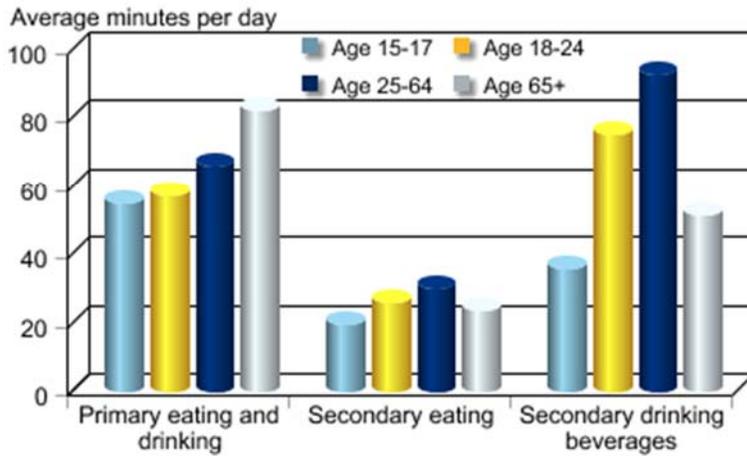
Note: Constant grazers are those who spend over 4.5 hours a day in eating/drinking activities.

Data for individuals, age 15 and older.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey and ERS Eating and Health Module.

Individuals age 65 and older spent more time on primary eating and drinking (an average of 82 minutes per day), and less time on secondary eating and drinking than those age 25-64.

People age 65 and older spent the most time in primary eating and drinking in 2008

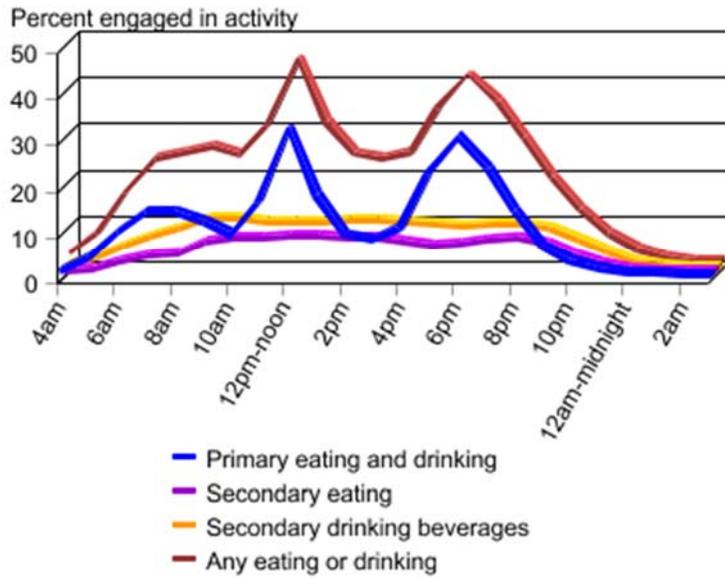


Note: Data for individuals, age 15 and older.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey and ERS Eating and Health Module.

Over the course of a day, about 25 percent of the population was engaged in some eating or drinking activity at some time between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m. Between 12 p.m. (noon) and 1 p.m., 45 percent of Americans were eating and/or drinking. The share of Americans engaged in eating or drinking activities during the evening peaked at 42 percent between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Percentage of Americans engaged in eating and drinking by time of day, 2008, age 15+

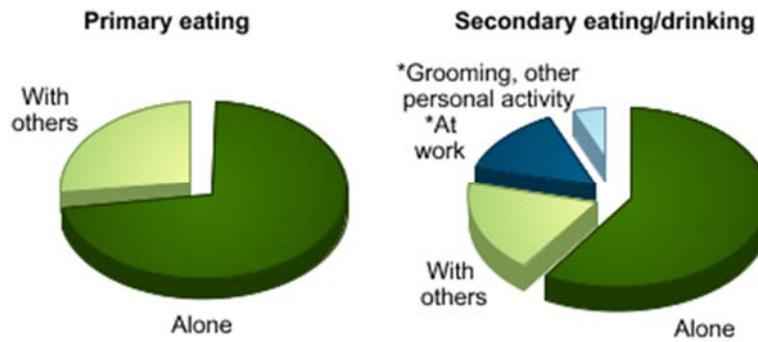


Note: Data for individuals, age 15 and older.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey and ERS Eating and Health Module.

Not surprisingly, people who live alone were more likely to eat alone. Individuals in single-person households ate alone for primary eating/drinking 73 percent of the time. For secondary eating/drinking, 59 percent ate or drank alone, and an additional 21 percent ate or drank at work or while grooming (or other personal activity). No information was collected on whether the respondent was alone or with someone for time spent at work or while engaged in a personal activity.

Single-person households, 2008



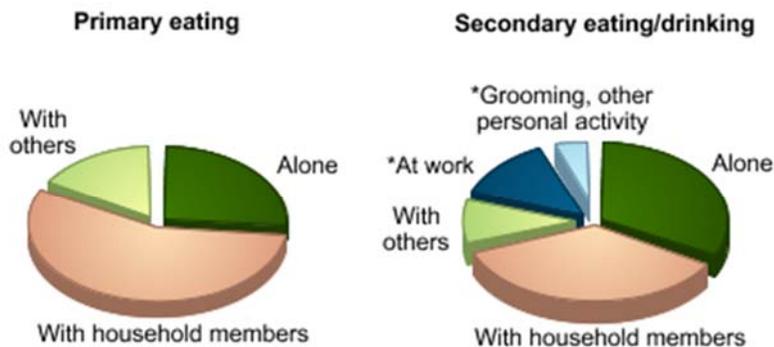
*Information not collected on "with whom" activity occurred.

Note: Data for individuals, age 15 and older.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey and ERS Eating and Health Module.

People in multi-person households ate with household members 56 percent of time for primary eating. However, only 37 percent of secondary eating/drinking time was with household members, and a total of 20 percent of the time was at work or while engaged in personal activities, about the same as for persons who live alone.

Multi-person households, 2008



*Information not collected on "with whom" activity occurred.

Note: Data for individuals, age 15 and older.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey and ERS Eating and Health Module.

Estimating total time eating and drinking

There are three major considerations in estimating the total time spent on eating and drinking. First, as the data are collected, if a respondent reports both secondary eating and secondary drinking during a primary activity, it is not known whether secondary eating and secondary drinking occurs at the same time. ERS developed a method of estimating total time spent on secondary eating and drinking to account for this overlap. An alternative approach is to use a range of total time. ERS also recommends analyzing primary and secondary time use components separately. Most secondary eating is done without secondary drinking and vice versa; in only 18 percent of the cases were both secondary eating and secondary drinking reported during the same primary activity.

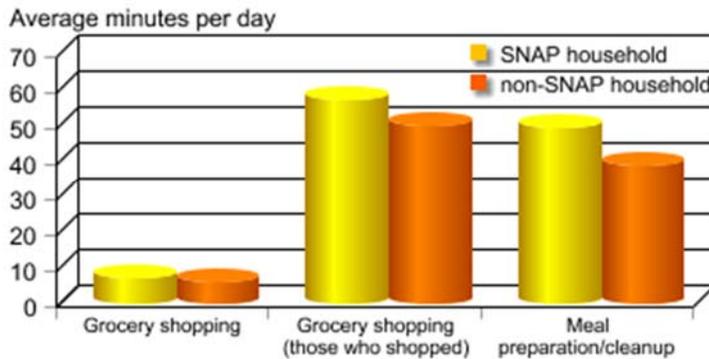
Second, when summing any primary activity and any secondary activity, there is a concern that the intensity of the activities may be different. Consequently, the sum may overstate the total time spent on eating and drinking. Third, due to the constraints of a 24-hour day, primary and secondary activities should not be summed since this would result in a day longer than 24 hours. See [Documentation](#).

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/Food Stamp Program participants

A larger share of respondents in 2008 than in 2006-07 reported that their household received food assistance. This is likely due to the recession that began in December 2007. Among low-income households, individuals in households participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program) spent more time grocery shopping, preparing food, and caring for children than individuals in low-income nonparticipating households. The time engaged in housework was also about the same for the two groups.

Respondents in SNAP-participating households were less likely to report excellent or very good general health, and more likely to report good, fair, or poor health. Indeed, 12 percent of individuals in SNAP households reported poor general health, whereas only 3 percent of the total population considered their general health status as poor.

Individuals in households participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) spent more time in grocery shopping and meal preparation than other low-income persons in 2008



Note: Data for individuals, age 18 and older.

As of October 1, 2008, the Food Stamp Program was renamed as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

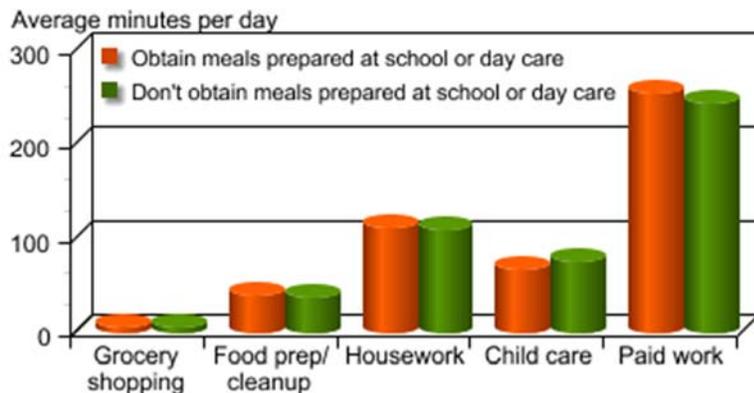
Non-SNAP household income is <130% poverty threshold.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey and ERS Eating and Health Module.

Meals obtained at school or day care

Respondents from households with children 18 years of age or younger were asked if children in the household obtained meals prepared at school, day care, or a summer program. In 2008, 54 percent of households with children reported that at least one child obtained either breakfast, lunch or both meals from school, day care or a summer program. In such households, adult respondents spent more time in paid work, and less time in child care than did respondents from other households with children. Interestingly, they spent about the same amount of time in food preparation and cleanup.

Obtaining children's meals from school or day care is associated with more time spent in paid work and less time spent in child care in 2008



Data for individuals age 19 or older, with children or youth in household.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey and ERS Eating and Health Module.

Grocery shopping and meal preparation

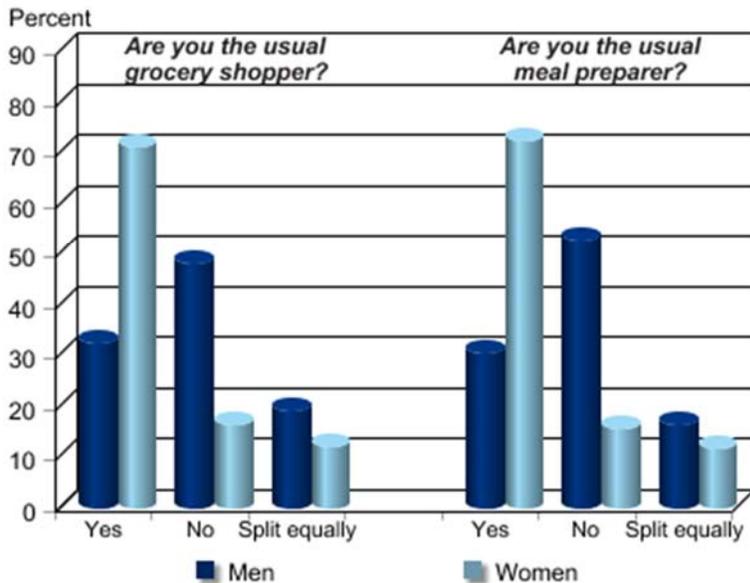
Based on self-reports, 48 percent of men were not the usual person responsible for grocery shopping in the household and 53 percent said they were not usual person responsible for meal preparation; over 70 percent of women said they were the usual person responsible for both tasks. In addition, men were more likely than women to respond that these tasks were split equally.

Among the usual grocery shoppers in the household for all persons age 18 and older, men spent an average of 6 minutes a day grocery shopping, compared with 9 minutes for women. Looking only at men who actually grocery shopped on a given day, the average time was 41 minutes (noting that grocery shopping is not a daily activity). All women averaged 9 minutes a day grocery shopping, and among only those women who actually shopped, they spent an average of 49 minutes.

Of those who split grocery shopping equally with other household members, men still averaged 6 minutes a day on the task, and women, 9 minutes. Among only those who grocery shopped, men spent 47 minutes and women 50 minutes.

Among the usual meal preparers, men spent an average of 28 minutes a day preparing meals, and women, 54 minutes. Of those who split meal preparation equally with other household members, men spent an average of 25 minutes a day, and women, 38 minutes.

In 2008, women are more likely to report being the household grocery shopper and meal preparer; men were more likely to report "no" or "split equally"



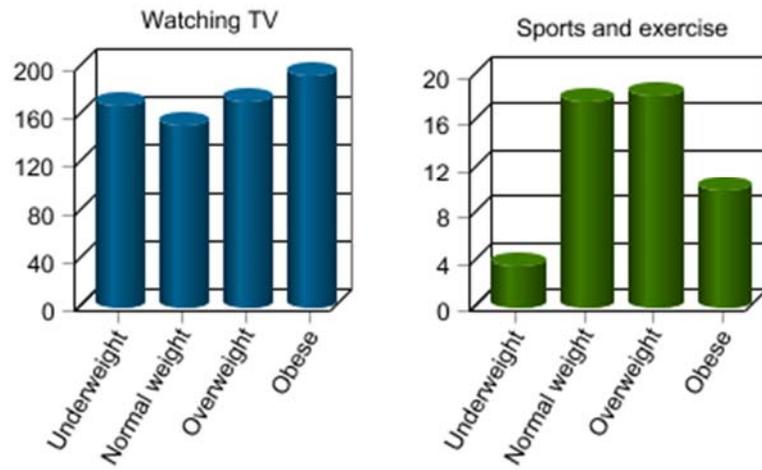
Note: Data for individuals, age 18 and older.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey and ERS Eating and Health Module.

Body Mass Index

In 2008, time spent by Americans age 20 and older on eating and drinking did not vary much by Body Mass Index (BMI)--underweight, normal weight, overweight, and obese. Interestingly, normal-weight people spent more time in primary eating and drinking as well as in secondary eating than those in other weight groups. All groups averaged about the same amount of time in secondary drinking. The average times spent by Americans working for pay, sleeping, watching television, and participating in sports and exercise varied considerably by BMI levels. Individuals who are overweight or obese spent more time watching television and less time participating in sports and exercise than did those of normal weight. The overweight group spent the most time engaged in paid work activities and had a low average time spent sleeping. The underweight group spent a greater amount of time sleeping than the other groups.

In 2008, obese people spent more time watching television and less time in exercising and sports than others (average minutes per day)



Note: Data for individuals, age 20 and older.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey and ERS Eating and Health Module.