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Summary Findings

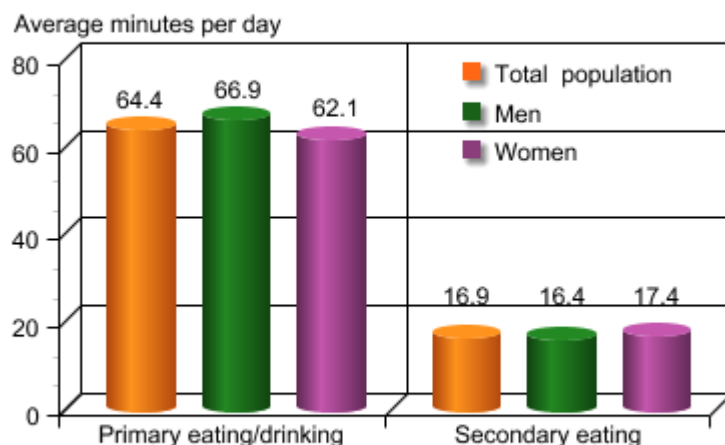
American eating patterns: 2015

Examining the eating patterns of the U.S. population is a key factor in better understanding the determinants of the nutrition and health status of Americans. An analysis of the time that Americans spend in various activities—and, in particular, food-related activity—may provide some insight into why nutrition and health outcomes vary over time and across different segments of the population. Such insights could help improve programs and policies targeted at reducing obesity and improving overall nutrition.

ERS collected data on Americans' time use and eating patterns in the ERS-developed Eating and Health Module (EH Module) of the nationally representative American Time Use Survey (ATUS). Data were collected on soft drink consumption, Body Mass Index (BMI), exercise frequency, USDA food assistance program participation, grocery shopping, meal preparation, meat thermometer usage, and raw milk consumption in 2015. Findings from the 2015 EH Module include the following:

On an average day in 2015, Americans age 15 and older spent 64 minutes eating and drinking as a "primary," or main, activity, and 17 minutes eating as a secondary activity—that is, eating while engaged in another activity such as watching television, driving, preparing meals, or working. On an average day, men spent more time engaged in primary eating and drinking than women.

Time spent in primary eating and drinking, and in secondary eating, by gender, on an average day in 2015, age 15 and older



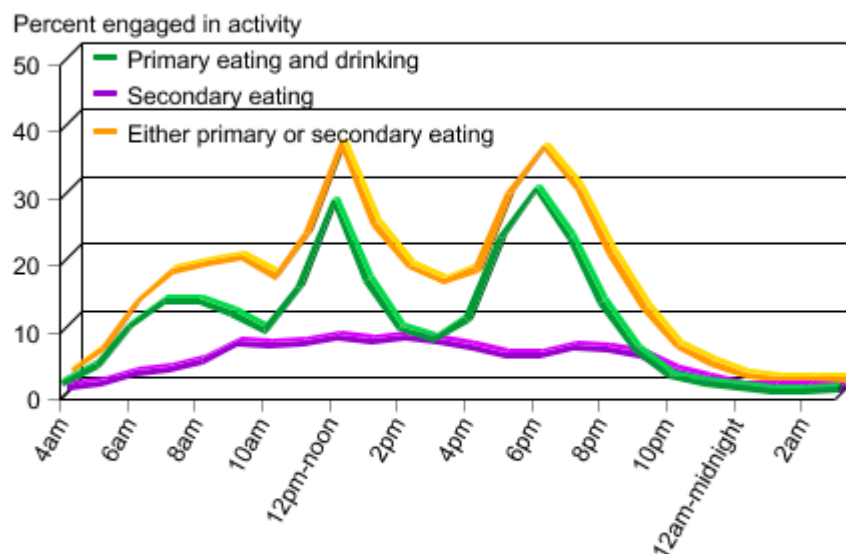
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey, and ERS, Eating and Health Module (ATUS).

[Download larger size chart \(450 pixels by 330, 96 dpi\) \(/webdocs/charts/54568/time_gender.png?v=42823\)](/webdocs/charts/54568/time_gender.png?v=42823)

[Download chart data \(/media/9086/age_gender.xlsx\)](/media/9086/age_gender.xlsx) in Excel format.

Americans have 2 peak times for primary eating/drinking—noon to 1 pm and 6 to 7 pm—when over 35 percent are engaged in primary eating/drinking or secondary eating. In a less popular time period, from 7 to 9 am, 17 to 19 percent of Americans engaged in primary eating/drinking. From 9 am to 9 pm, 5 percent or more of Americans engaged in secondary eating each hour.

Percentage of Americans engaged in eating and drinking by time of day, on an average day in 2015, age 15 and older



Note: Data for individuals, age 15 and older.

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

[Download larger size chart \(450 pixels by 410, 96 dpi\) \(/webdocs/charts/54572/time_age.png?v=42823\)](#)

[Download chart data \(/media/9064/time_of_day.xlsx\)](#) in Excel format.

A larger share of men reported consuming regular soft drinks while engaged in other activities, while a larger share of women reported consuming diet soft drinks. Those who consumed diet soft drinks while multi-tasking had a higher average body mass index (BMI) than those who consumed regular soft drinks.

Among those individuals who reported being the household's usual meal preparer or who split the task equally with other household members, 88 percent had prepared some form of meat in the previous week; of those, 14.5 percent used a meat/food thermometer when preparing meat for household consumption. Individuals who did prepare meat spent an average of 52 minutes in meal preparation and cleanup, whereas those who did not prepare meat spent less time—an average of 30 minutes.

Participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), WIC Program (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) participants, and those with household income less than 185 percent of the poverty threshold all spent more time preparing food and cleaning up, on an average day, than others.

Low-income persons, those with household incomes less than 185 percent of the poverty threshold, were less likely to grocery shop on an average day than others—13.6 percent shopped for groceries on an average day in 2015, which is equivalent to grocery shopping every 7.4 days; whereas 14.2 percent of others grocery shopped on an average day, equivalent to shopping every 7.0 days. Those who were food insufficient reported the lowest grocery shopping rate, 11.9 percent on an average day, equivalent to grocery shopping every 8.4 days.

Obese individuals spent an average of 3.2 hours a day watching television and movies, whereas those of normal weight spent an average of 2.5 hours a day doing so. Two-thirds of normal weight individuals reported exercising in the previous 7 days, whereas slightly more than half (54.2 percent) of obese individuals exercised in the

previous week.

For more information about using the data, see:

[2014-16 Eating & Health Module User's Guide \(2016 Edition\) \(/publications/pub-details/?pubid=42817\)](/publications/pub-details/?pubid=42817)

Findings for the 2014-16 EH Modules are available in pdf format:

- [Findings: 2014 \(/media/9062/ehm_summaryfindings2014.pdf\)](/media/9062/ehm_summaryfindings2014.pdf)

Findings for the 2006-08 EH Modules are available in pdf format:

- [Findings: 2008 \(/media/8758/ehmodule_2008findings.pdf\)](/media/8758/ehmodule_2008findings.pdf)
- [Findings: 2007 \(/media/8757/ehmodule_2007findings.pdf\)](/media/8757/ehmodule_2007findings.pdf)
- [Findings: 2006 \(/media/8756/ehmodule_2006findings.pdf\)](/media/8756/ehmodule_2006findings.pdf)