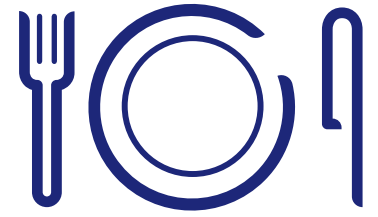


What and where do young adults eat?



The foods and drinks we purchase and consume outside the home are often high in energy (kilojoules), saturated fat, added sugars and sodium (salt). These include fast food, take away, café and restaurant meals and snacks, as well as smoothies, coffees, doughnuts and muffins. Young adults eat away from the home for many reasons. It may be a celebration or special occasion, for lunch while at work or university, or they may grab something to eat or drink on the go while they're out and about. Studies show that frequently consuming these foods and drinks is linked with poorer diets, higher energy, saturated fat and sodium intake and weight gain. In Australia, young adults spend the largest proportion of their income on fast food and eating out compared with any other age group.

Unfortunately, this age group also has the fastest rate of weight gain of any adult age group. In NSW, 34% of 16–24 year olds and 47% of 25–34 year olds have excess body fat.

Study 1: The MYMeals Study

The Measuring Young adults' Meals (MYMeals) Study is an Australian-first study that used a smartphone app to measure the foods and drinks purchased and eaten outside the home by young adults, and the contribution these foods and drinks made to their dietary intake.



A sample of 1,001 young adults aged 18 to 30 years who lived in NSW and ate or drank out of home at least once per week took part in the study. Participants were from a variety of socio-demographic backgrounds, including males and females, higher and lower income areas, and metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.

The study aimed to measure:

1. The contribution that foods purchased outside the home made to energy, saturated fat, total sugars, and sodium intakes of participants.
2. Where these foods were purchased.
3. Whether there were any differences between any groups e.g. males and females.

The study defined foods purchased outside the home as any ready-to-eat foods that were not purchased from a supermarket, grocer or food store, home grown, gathered, foraged, or given. This included foods and drinks from fast food chains as well as foods and drinks from independent outlets, such as cafes, restaurants, pubs, clubs, bars, cafeterias, or sporting venues. Laws require common fast food chains to display a product's kilojoule content beside the name and price on the menu or menu board (menu labelling), while chains with less outlets and those that are independent do not need to show that information (non-menu labelling).

WHAT WE DID

Participants recorded everything they ate or drank into our custom-designed smartphone app, Eat and Track (EaT) app. They were asked to provide details on the amount eaten, where the food was from and whether the food was a meal (breakfast, lunch, or dinner), a snack or drink.

Researchers contacted participants to make sure they hadn't forgotten to record foods or drinks. Once they had recorded three days of data, they were sent a final survey to complete.

Researchers analysed how many eating occasions involved food and drink purchased and consumed outside the home, and what type of outlets the products were being purchased from. We looked at how much these foods and

drinks purchased outside the home contributed to total energy and nutrient intake. To do this we used databases that contained information on the nutrition content of different foods, including common branded products.

WHAT WE FOUND

In total, 1,001 participants completed the MYMeals Study, recording 8,064 meals and 8,052 snacks. Of the participants, 57% were female, and 52% had university qualifications. There was a mix of participants who lived in higher and lower income areas, and metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.

Overall, about one in three (31%) eating occasions were foods and drinks purchased outside the home. However, these foods contributed 42% of daily energy, 43% saturated fat, 40% sugars and 47% sodium intake.

1 in 3 eating occasions were foods purchased outside the home, but contributed over 40% of daily energy, saturated fat and sugars, and almost half their sodium intake.

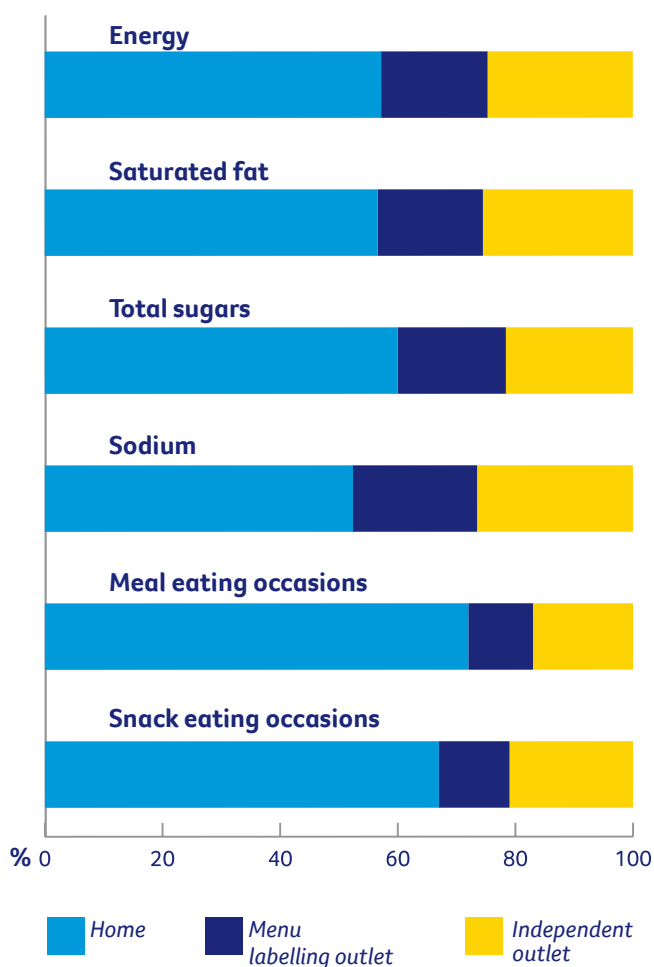


FIGURE: Proportion of energy, nutrients and meal and snack eating occasions contributed by foods prepared at home and outside of home (menu labelling and independent / non-menu labelling food outlets)

Of the foods and drinks eaten outside the home, products purchased from independent outlets provided a greater percentage of energy compared to fast food outlets where menu labelling regulation requires them to provide energy (kilojoule) information.

WHAT THIS MEANS

Almost one-third of foods and drinks consumed by NSW young adults were prepared outside of the home. However, these foods contributed about 40% of total energy and nutrients of public health concern (saturated fat, sugar, and sodium). While many people know that a lot of these products are unhealthy choices, these results highlight the negative impact foods prepared outside the home can have on the diets of young adults.

Amongst NSW young adults, more energy for foods and drinks eaten away from home was coming from independent outlets (24%) compared with fast food outlets (19%). This is important as independent outlets not covered by menu labelling regulation do not need to label their menus with the energy (kilojoules) in their foods and drinks. Expanding current menu labelling regulations to a wider range of food outlets and including information about levels of other nutrients such as sugar, saturated fat, and sodium would help provide young adults with more information about the foods and drinks they are buying. Empowering them with knowledge about the nutrition content of these foods can help young adults find healthier options when selecting food away from the home.

Product reformulation to reduce salt, added sugar, saturated fat and energy, and sensible portion sizes offers an opportunity to improve the diet quality of NSW young adults, and may help curb weight gain during this life stage.



Study 2: Young adults providing solutions on ways to support the consumption of healthier meals when eating out

WHAT WE DID

To find out what influenced young adults' choices when eating out we ran four focus groups in Sydney with 31 young adults aged between 18 and 30 years. We also sought their views on how the food environment can be more supportive to promote healthier eating.

WHAT WE FOUND

The main themes that emerged in these groups were:

- Participants viewed eating out as a special occasion and an indulgence, so selecting healthy options was not a priority.
- Participants identified smartphones as important tools to access information on food options via social media. Reviews, food photos and menus accessed via smartphones influenced food choices. Additionally, young people use smartphones to instantly purchase take-away food and have it delivered.
- Overall, the young people in this study thought that healthy food is expensive relative to unhealthy food, and this influenced eating out choices. Smartphones can also help young people source value-for-money meals.
- They regarded the addition of kilojoule labelling as an effective means of encouraging them to find healthier, lower energy meals. However, they acknowledged that many people had no concept of what a kilojoule was.
- Some suggested listing the amount of added sugars or expressing the energy content of food in terms of the amount of physical activity required to balance the energy consumption as more helpful to encourage healthy eating.
- Participants suggested the use of a simple and easy to understand rating system endorsed by a credible organization to nudge young adults towards healthy options when eating out.

WHAT THIS MEANS

The young adults in the study identified a range of food environment and social environment-related factors that would support healthier options when eating meals prepared outside the home. Some suggestions such as price discounts and food labels have already been shown to have positive impacts on diet. They also highlighted the continuing influence of their peers in decision-making around food and pinpointed growing influences such as smartphone apps. They used these apps to order food and access reviews. They also viewed persuasive food imagery posted by friends, companies, and others on social media. This information is useful to design policies and information to help young adults select healthier options when eating out.

We recommend governments continue to develop menu labelling systems and extend their reach beyond the restaurants now captured by menu labelling legislation. Changes in food pricing to support healthy choices and social marketing campaigns also need to be considered.



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