

Vermonters Choose Healthy Eating Habits: Children and Time Impact Eating Choices Most

Introduction

The Vermont Poll is an annual public opinion survey of Vermont residents who are 18 years of age and older, conducted by the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont. The poll is conducted by a team of non-profit agencies, government officials, and researchers. On the 2008 Vermont Poll, six questions were asked of residents to understand their level of concern for eating healthy foods, what is important to them in preparing a healthy meal, and how their time influences their cooking and dining out practices (See Appendix A for a complete list of questions).

Slightly more than half of respondents surveyed are female (52%, 320) and 48% (294) are male. The average age of respondents was 56 years old (Std. = 15.3) with a median age of 57 years. The youngest age was 20 years, and the oldest was 95. Education data was collapsed into two categories, with 24% (149) having attained a high school diploma or GED certificate and 76% (465) completed some college education or a higher degree. Examining household income by median income in Vermont (\$50,000), 39% (213) of respondents earn less than the median income in Vermont and 61% (335) earn at or above the median income. Respondents had a median household size of two, with a range of one to nine. Family composition showed that 72% (439) of households had no children, while 28% (17) had children in their household. The number of children in households ranged from 1 to 5 with a median and mode of two children. The majority of Vermonters surveyed reported that they are of a Caucasian decent (97%, 582).

Findings

Table 1 shows that the majority of Vermonters surveyed, 94%, are concerned with eating healthy foods. Women (97%, 308) are more likely than men (90%, 265) to be concerned about their eating habits ($\chi^2=9.55$, $p < .01$). In addition, people who are under 56 years of age and have children (95%, 143) are more likely to express concern for eating healthy foods than those under 56 without children ($\chi^2=3.06$, $p < .10$).

Table 1. Concerned with eating healthy foods

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	575	93.6
No	39	6.4

Table 2 shows that the most important factor when preparing a healthy meal at home is the type of ingredients used, over calories, cooking techniques, and portion sizes. Vermonters who are under 56 years of age with children living at home (82%, 121) are more likely to feel that ingredients are the most important factor, compared to those who are in this age group and do not have children (71%, 97) ($\chi^2=15.17$, $p < .01$).

Table 2. Most important factor when preparing a healthy meal at home

	Frequency	Percent
Type of ingredients used	445	74.9
Total number of calories	54	9.1
Cooking techniques used	47	7.9
Other	31	5.2
Amount of food served	17	2.9

Table 4 shows that 51% of respondents reported not eating their dinner meal out at a restaurant, while 49% (299) reported going out between one and six times per week for dinner at a restaurant. Of those who eat out at least once a week at a restaurant, the average is 1.3 times a week, and the median and mode are one time a week. Though no statistical significance was found, groups with a higher average number of times eating out are those who feel they have limited time, that restaurant meals are equally healthy to those cooked at home, and live in an urban area.

Table 4. Number of times respondent has dinner at a restaurant on a weekly basis

	Frequency	Percent
0	312	51.1
1	23	38.5
2	44	7.2
3	10	1.6
4	4	.7
5	3	.5
6	3	.5
Total	611	100.0

Q: q12 *****

In a typical week, how many times do you have DINNER at a restaurant?

Number of times [INTERVIEWER: Don't know = 8 Refused = 9]
if (q12=0) skip q15

Q: q13 *****

Typically, do you think that a meal at a restaurant is:

- 1.Less healthy than a meal at home
- 2.Equally healthy as a meal at home
- 3.More healthy than a meal at home
- 4.I do not purchase meals at restaurants [DO NOT READ]
- 5.Don't know [DO NOT READ]
- 6.Refused [DO NOT READ]

Q: q14 *****

Does the amount of time you have to cook influence how often you go to restaurants?

- 1.Yes
- 2.No
- 3.Don't Know [DO NOT READ]
- 4.Refused [DO NOT READ]