

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

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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, to gauge Vermonters' opinions on current issues of interest to 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).

Respondent demographics

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 members in one's household. An analysis of 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 ($\chi^2=9.55, p\leq.01$). 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 ($\chi^2=3.06, p\leq.10$).

Table 1. Concerned with eating healthy foods

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	575	93.6
No	39	6.4
Total	614	100.0

Table 2 shows that the “type of ingredients used” when preparing a meal at home is the most important factor when preparing a “healthy” meal, over calories, cooking techniques, and portion sizes. Vermonter’s 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) ($\chi^2=15.17$, $p\leq.01$).

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
Total	594	100.0

Other important factors given by respondents include:

- All of the above or combination (8)
- Local/organic/quality ingredients (6)
- Amount of time to cook/prepare (3)
- Appearance/desire for food (2)
- Prepared foods based on dietary needs such as having diabetes or high cholesterol (2)
- Ease of preparation
- Like a good meal every night
- Nutrition
- Price
- Taste
- Theme / culture
- Whatever is available

Table 3 reports that for almost two thirds of Vermont respondents, the ability to prepare a healthy meal is not impacted by the amount of time they have to cook. However, more than half those with youngsters at home who are under the age of 18 felt that time impacts preparing a healthful meal, compared to 30% of those without children ($\chi^2=27.72$, $p\leq.01$).

Table 3. If ability to prepare a healthy meal is impacted by the amount of time respondents have to cook

	Frequency	Percent
No	391	63.8
Yes	222	36.2
Total	613	100.0

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

Table 5 shows that two thirds of respondents indicated that meals served as restaurants are less healthy than meals they prepare at home. On the contrary, 31% noted that meals from restaurants are equally as healthy as a meal made at home. The majority of those polled (70%, 211) feel that the amount of time they have to cook a meal does not influence their dining out habits (Table 6). Those with children are more likely to perceive restaurant meals to be less healthy than meals made at home ($\chi^2=6.40$, $p\leq.05$); however they are also more likely to dine out for dinner when they have limited time ($\chi^2=3.06$, $p\leq.10$).

Table 5. Perceived healthiness of meals at restaurant compared to meals at home

	Frequency	Percent
Less healthy than a meal at home	191	65.6
Equally healthy as a meal at home	91	31.3
More healthy than a meal at home	9	3.1
Total	291	100.0

Table 6. If amount of time to cook influences frequency of eating out at a restaurant

	Frequency	Percent
No	211	70.1
Yes	90	29.9
Total	301	100.0

Methodology

The data used in this report was collected by the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont as part of the annual Vermonter Poll. The survey was conducted between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. beginning on February 26, 2008 and ending on March 7, 2008. The telephone polling was conducted from the University of Vermont using computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI). The sample for the poll was drawn using a simple random sample of telephone exchanges in the state of Vermont as the sampling frame. Only Vermont residents over the age of eighteen were interviewed. The poll included questions on a variety of issues related to public policy in the state of Vermont. There were 617 respondents to the 2007 Vermonter Poll (Version II). The results based on a group of this size have a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percent at a confidence interval of 95 percent. This report was compiled by Michele Cranwell Schmidt at the Center for Rural Studies.

Appendix A.

Q: q9 *****

Now I have several questions about your meal choices.

Of the following choices, which is most important to you when preparing a healthy meal in your home?

- 1.The type of ingredients used
- 2.The amount of food served
- 3.The total number of calories
- 4.The cooking techniques used
- 5.Another option (please specify)
- 6.I don't prepare meals [DO NOT READ]
- 7.Don't Know [DO NOT READ]
- 8.Refused [DO NOT READ]

Q: q10 *****

Are you concerned with eating healthy foods?

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

Q: q11 *****

Is your ability to prepare a healthy meal impacted by the amount of time you have to cook?

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

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]