

# Food and health needs of food insecure young adults in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area during the COVID-19 pandemic



A University of Minnesota survey was conducted in April-May 2020 with young adult participants in the longitudinal Eating and Activity over Time (EAT) study. Young adults who had recently experienced one or more aspects of food insecurity were asked about resources needed to help them eat healthy food. Food insecurity is defined by lacking reliable access to adequate food for active, healthy living. For the purpose of this survey, food insecurity was measured using questions from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Household Food Security Survey Module.

## Key Findings

Resources that were most helpful in providing enough healthy food for children when schools and many businesses were closed.

**1 Child Nutrition Programs:** Schools providing meals

*"Getting meals from the school has helped me ensure my kids always have fruits and veggies and every meal."*

**2**

**Nutrition Programs for Adults & Families:** Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (**SNAP**), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (**WIC**), and food shelves

**3**

**Planning of Meals & Snacks**



*"Many stores aren't allowing children in. I am a single mother so I have mostly been purchasing ahead of time and getting dry items. This limits our food. . . . We got free food thru school but most of the items my daughter will not eat."*



Resource(s) most helpful for getting enough healthy food.

**1**

**Relief Funds/Money.** Another stimulus check or other relief funds.

**2**

**Food Assistance.** Larger amount of benefits from programs such as SNAP, ability to use benefits for food delivery/pick-up, and vouchers for healthy foods/fresh produce.

**3**

**Access to Food at Food Pantries & Retail Stores.** More culturally diverse food options at food pantries, stocking of food items at retail stores, and free food delivery/pick-up options.

*"I tried to get SNAP but they said my income was too high and were only going to give me 5 dollars a month. . . . I am barely able to buy food."*



*"I am eating more canned foods and rice, and eating less fruits and veggies. I am unable to access fresh fruits and vegetables due to the cost of them, as my income is restricted at the moment."*



*"With social distancing and wait times I feel like going to places like McDonald's or like Arby's due to impatience and fear of getting infected around others"*

## How events related to COVID-19 influenced eating behaviors, including purchasing and preparing food.

- 1 Irregular Meal Patterns: Overeating & Restriction.** Mixed responses based on individual experiences with lack of money, changing sleeping schedules, stress, anxiety, lack of exercise opportunities, and boredom. Many young adults mentioned snacking more often or grazing throughout the day.
- 2 Preparing & Shopping for Food.** Stress and anxiety over how to safely shop for food. Some are buying more often, some less often; some purchased food in larger quantities, some in smaller quantities due to shortages.
- 3 Types of Food Consumed.** Less fresh food, more frozen and non-perishable foods, and more sugary snacks/junk food. Eating out more, especially from fast food establishments, unless avoiding them due to fear of getting sick.

## Implications

There are a few things that persons working to provide food and nutrition support for their communities can do to assist young adults during this time.

1. Inform young adults about the **SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot** and how they can use their EBT card with participating retailers.
2. **Be an advocate** for increasing food assistance benefits to not only families but also to **single-person households**.
3. Provide **education on how to safely shop for and handle groceries** brought into the home to alleviate fears.
4. Share **resources on stress eating, meal prepping, and budget-friendly** ways to add variety into their diet.
5. **Food pantries/food shelves and school meal programs** should be supported in their efforts to aid young adults and encouraged to provide more culturally diverse options.
6. **Community organizations**, especially those who have received a surge in funding, can **provide young adults with gift cards** to grocery stores. This allows for buying what is needed and one is familiar with preparing instead of having to work with what is available at food banks or in pre-made food bags.

## Authors and Contact Information

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