Community Perceptions of Food Selection and the Path to a Healthy Diet

“Food Selection — you are what you eat!”

All Part of Generation Better
The Medibank Health Check is a quarterly survey focusing on topics which are relevant to Australians' health and well being, and where personal action or involvement of the health services sector may be required.

The Medibank Health Check aims to inform debate around emerging health related issues and unpack what may be required to take action to address emerging health concerns.

It is a survey of a representative national sample of 1,500 people.

The first four Medibank Health Check reports looked at:

- The health impact of ‘screen-time’;
- Life aspirations and where ‘living in good’ health rated on Australians’ list of priorities;
- Australians’ views on health and wellbeing in the workplace – its importance, responsibilities and health impacts; and
- How people view physical appearance and health, and whether body image is a proxy for good health.

Medibank Health Check #5 looks at food selection: the factors influencing it, how our perception of a healthy diet compares to Australian standards, and opportunities and barriers to better food selection and an improved diet.
Executive Summary

This Medibank Health Check seeks to understand the key factors affecting the food people select and, in turn, the barriers to choosing healthy food and improved wellbeing.

The key findings from a representative national survey of 1,500 respondents across Australian community are:

• Price, nutritional value and mood (how I am feeling) are the leading influences on food selection and consumption.

• Cultural and religious factors hold the least influence on food selection and consumption, and become even less important with age.

• A significant proportion of people are prepared to trade off price to buy a nutritious option (48 per cent) or pay extra for food that is close, rather travel for a cheaper option (41 per cent).

• Meal selection for nearly 7 in 10 respondents depends on what is in their kitchen.

• 68 per cent of people eat with their families and a similar amount eat what is served up to them, while 29 per cent cook just for themselves.

• 40 per cent of people know they should change their diet and they believe they know what to do.

• Healthy food is available and accessible to the vast majority of respondents.

• Respondents overwhelmingly believe there is a connection between a healthy lifestyle and making the right food choices, but only half believe their diet is due to factors within their control.

Overall this Medibank Health Check shows that the factors influencing food selection are complex. This translates into a situation where people feel they have limited control over their selection and what they eat.

This Medibank Health Check suggests that the path to a better diet rests with people first identifying what is within their control when it comes to food selection.
Food Selection—
you are what you eat!

The Main Influences on Food Selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mood</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutritional Value</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Control Over the Food People eat—
The fact that people feel they don’t have control over the food they eat is of particular concern, with the survey showing:

- 64% of people eat what is served up to them.
- 54% believe they should change their diet but don’t know how.
- 53% find it difficult to make healthy choices.
- 69% say meal selection depends on what is in the kitchen.

Household Situation

People’s home situation will determine whether they eat with family members or just cook for them. This in turn can impact on food selection.

- 60% say they eat in front of the TV.
- 61% say they snack in between meals.
**Introduction**

If we are what eat, then how do Australians choose what to put in their mouths? As it turns out, food selection is not as straightforward as it may seem.

In reality, there are myriad factors which influence this everyday decision, that can compromise one’s path to improved health and wellbeing.

There is a wide variety of literature and research on the factors affecting food selection. It shows that food choice is based on a range of behaviour and situational factors. When unpacked a seemingly simple decision about what to eat becomes a much more complicated choice.

This Health Check examines eight critical factors around food selection. Survey participants were asked to respond to a variety of statements indicating whether they felt the statement is true or untrue of them. The factors examined were:

1. **Price**—Identified in the literature as a key determinant in food purchases, but do people consider price before other factors, such as nutrition or availability of food?
2. **Preparation**—This factor is about the impact of time in preparing food and how it influences decisions about whether to prepare meals.
3. **Routine**—What people are used to doing impacts food choice, for example whether they eat regular meals or snack, or whether they eat in front of the TV or at the family table.
4. **Household Situation**—People’s home situations will determine whether they eat with family members or just cook for ourselves, which in turn can impact on food selection.
5. **Knowledge**—This factor is about the adequacy of diet knowledge to make healthy food choices.
6. **Availability and Access**—This is to do with the variety and proximity of food, willingness to travel and the availability of healthy food.
7. **Belief and Culture**—Upbringing upbringing and cultural background is strongly-connected to food choice, especially for young people.
8. **Emotion**—This is about how mood or disposition affects one’s food selection.

In total, we put 41 statements across these eight factors to survey respondents to unpack the influences on food choices. Key demographic differences, such as the impact of income, gender and age, are examined across each of the 41 statements.

The influence of marketing and advertising is not fully addressed in this Health Check due to the scale of this topic. It is, however, addressed in part when we look at the impact of knowledge on food selection. Similarly, the role of a person’s health situation on their food selection is not addressed in detail but is a specific focus in an early question in the Health Check.
The Medibank Health Check is a representative survey of 1,500 respondents across all Australian States and Territories. This survey was conducted from 17 to 19 February 2015. The sample was proportionally spread by State, gender, age, income and employment status. A full list of the questions from the survey can be found at the end of this report.
Before eating, most Australians make a calculation: how much will it cost, what is its (nutritional) value and what they feel like eating.

The first section of the survey asks respondents to rank factors in order of influence from most to least, from a list of eight “top of mind” factors which influence food selection.

The Health Check reveals that price, nutritional value and mood (how they are feeling) are the leading factors in food selection and consumption.

The three most highly rated influences on food selection are:

- **How I am Feeling**—Rated by 26 per cent of respondents as having the most influence on food choice. This influence generally declines with age but peaks in the 55-64 age-group.

- **Price**—Rated by 23 per cent of respondents as having the most influence on their food choice. The influence of price generally becomes less important with increasing age and income; and

- **Nutritional Value**—rated by 22 per cent of respondents as having the most influence on their food choice, an influence which significantly increases with age;

Allergy or health factors were identified as the most important influence on food selection for eight per cent of respondents.

Cultural and religious factors have the least influence in food selection and consumption by a significant margin, and have even less influence with increasing age.
A Closer Look at Factors Affecting Food Selection

The second section of the survey tested 41 statements relating to food selection across eight key categories. Respondents could assess each statement as being true of them, somewhat true of them, neutral, somewhat untrue of them or untrue of them.

Price

Price is the #1 when it comes to food selection.

The statement “I always look at the price of food before I buy” ranked the highest across the 41 statements, with 76 per cent agreeing the statement was true or somewhat true of them. The strength of the response increased with females but was generally neutral for income and age.

Buying fruit and vegetables when they are cheaper and in season, as well as looking for cheaper options, were also important influences on food selection, although the influence of the latter decreased with age. The strength of the responses to both statements increased with females.

Interestingly, 33 per cent of respondents agreed that “Price was no object – I buy the food I want”. Agreement with this statement increased with income.
Price (Continued)

Some people are prepared to trade off price for nutritious food or pay extra for food that is closer.

We looked at the potential ‘trade offs’ against buying on price and found that nearly half of the respondents (48 per cent) would select a nutritious option before considering price and 41 per cent were prepared to pay extra for food that is closer rather than travel for cheaper food.

There is a significant ‘neutral’ element to these questions, suggesting people are undecided when it comes to selecting food based on price versus nutritional value, proximity, food for children or buying organic food.
A Closer Look at Factors Affecting Food Selection

Food Preparation

The ‘kitchen rules’ when it comes to what we eat, (69 per cent told us their meals depend on what is in their kitchens).

What people have in their kitchen is the leading influence on food selection when ‘preparation’ is looked at as a factor. The time it takes to prepare meals, i.e. avoiding preparing meals that take more than 30 minutes has the least influence of the factors tested.

The prevalence of eating what is in the kitchen increases with age and gender (female skew). Eating pre-prepared meals decreases with age and income and is higher amongst males. These findings point towards the opportunity for people to include a wider variety of foods in their shopping trollies, so when they go to the kitchen cupboard at meal time, it is likely to include a healthier selection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparation Situation</th>
<th>Influence on Food Selection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My meals will depend on what I have in the kitchen</td>
<td>69% True and Somewhat True of me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I plan my meals ahead so that I have the food I need</td>
<td>59% True and Somewhat True of me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will eat a pre-prepared meal at least once a week</td>
<td>43% True and Somewhat True of me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time is not an issue when it comes to preparing a meal</td>
<td>37% True and Somewhat True of me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will go and buy the food I need for the meal that day</td>
<td>36% True and Somewhat True of me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will avoid meals that take more than 30 minutes to prepare</td>
<td>33% True and Somewhat True of me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Routines

People are eating regular meals as well as snacking between meals.

Of the six statements around routine which were tested, respondents rated eating regular meals and snacking between meals as being mostly true of them (68 per cent and 61 per cent respectively). Both responses were elevated for females.

High ratings were also received for “I eat in front of the TV” (60 per cent rated as true or somewhat true of them) and “I have a sit-down meal most nights” (56 per cent). The inclination to sit down with family increases with income. Eating in front of the TV shows no significant gender, income or age differences. It is worth noting that ‘distracted eaters’, i.e. those who eat in front of TV, consume more food and less healthy food (American Journal of Clinical Nutrition 2013).

Only 29 per cent stated they eat at a restaurant once a week. This decreases with age and increases with income and with males.
Household Situation

More people eat with their families and eat something that is served up to them than cook or eat by themselves.

In terms of the influence of the household situation, the existence of a family is a likely key determinant of what people select to eat, with 68 per cent of respondents saying they usually eat with other family members. This result is higher for female respondents.

Respondents who agreed with the statement – “I cook for a family” – are more likely to be middle-aged and female, while people who cook just for themselves are more likely to be male.
Knowledge

People want to change their diet but they are confused and sometimes feel they are being misled.

41 per cent of people know they should change their diet and they believe they know what to do.

Nearly a third of respondents (30 per cent) find information about what is healthy confusing and 26 per cent find it hard to make healthy food choices. The significant ‘neutral’ response to the four statements in this category shows a reasonably high ‘knowledge gap’ when it comes to diet and food selection.

The findings of this Health Check around influence of food knowledge are supported by other research:

- A study in the Journal of Health Communication notes that exposure to conflicting news about the health benefits of certain foods, vitamins and supplements often results in confusion and backlash against nutrition recommendations (Nagler January 2014: 19)

- A conference paper by Stephan Mann (Framing Obesity in Economic Theory & Policy: 2006) cites Nayga (2000: 815) who found that “knowledge is inversely related to the probability that an individual is obese”.

Overall however, the influence of knowledge as a factor in food selection is of a lower order of importance compared to other factors in this survey.
A Closer Look at Factors Affecting Food Selection

Availability and Access

A variety of food is available and accessible to the vast majority.

71 per cent of respondents said the statement “I have a wide variety of food choices and outlets close to me” was true of them. This result does not change significantly by age or income but did increase for females.

People are prepared to travel to get the food they want and the willingness to do so increases with income.

Despite the high response to the ‘wide variety of food’ statement, 30 per cent of people agreed that availability of nearby food affects their ability to eat healthily.
Belief and Culture

People understand the link between good diet and better health but they are not always choosing the healthy option.

Respondents demonstrated a strong understanding of the link between a healthy lifestyle and making the right food choice, with 76 per cent saying the statement "I believe a healthy lifestyle is about making the right food choice" as being true of them. This did not vary significantly across age, gender or income.

Despite this, only 22 per cent rated ‘nutritional value’ as having the most influence in actual food selection (see table ‘What Factor has Most Influence on the Food you Consume?’, p.7).

Upbringing and the food parents used to cook are moderate influences of food selection, however only 22 per cent of respondents said the statement "My food is strongly influenced by my cultural background" is true of them. The impact of all of these statements decreases with age.
A Closer Look at Factors Affecting Food Selection

**Emotions**

An emotional connection to the food we eat is strong.

Two-thirds of respondents agreed with the statement: “I get a lot of pleasure out of eating food”.

Getting pleasure out of eating food increases with age, income and gender (female skewed).

Other influences of food selection include eating more when bored (51 per cent), stressed (36 per cent) and with family and friends (46 per cent). Importantly half of the respondents said the statement “My diet is due to factors beyond my control” was untrue of them – or put another way, only half of respondents consider their diet is within their control.

The older people are, the less likely they are to think about food, worry about the food they eat, or eat food to make them feel better.

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**Emotions Influence on Food Selection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>True and Somewhat True of me</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Untrue and Somewhat Untrue of me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I get a lot of pleasure out of eating food</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I eat more when I am bored</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I eat more when I am out with friends and family</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always worry about the food I eat</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I am sad eating food makes me feel better</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am always thinking about food</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel overwhelmed with food choices</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My diet is due to factors beyond my control</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The third section of the survey examines people’s perceptions of a healthy diet benchmarked against the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating Recommended Balanced Diet (National Health and Medical Research Council, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing).

The question asked: which one of the five options in the table below do you think is the healthiest diet?

In general, people were fairly close to the mark, with 32 per cent selecting Option 5: which is consistent with the Recommended Balanced Diet (Australian Guide to Healthy Eating) and 44 per cent selecting the next best option – equal amounts of all food groups. These findings do highlight that some people are however still unsure of what is the healthiest food options.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vegetables</th>
<th>Dairy</th>
<th>Protein</th>
<th>Grains</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Vegetables</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Protein</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Across Veg, Dairy, Protein, Grains, Fruit</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half Vegetables</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended Balanced Diet</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
People think their diet is healthier than it is.

The final question asked respondents to rate their diet and whether it was well-balanced or not.

Comparing perception and reality, the results show that while 42 per cent believe they have a well-balanced diet and don’t need to change, only 32 per cent selected the recommended balanced diet in the previous question.

Of greater concern is the 58 per cent of people who are neutral or consider their diet is not balanced and need to change. Most people do know what a healthy diet is but not many put this knowledge into practice.

These findings are supported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics report (4338.0 – Profiles of Health, Australia 2011-13) which shows that people are not eating enough good food. In 2011-12, only 48.5 per cent of Australians aged 18 years and over reported that they usually ate two or more serves of fruit per day (meeting the guidelines), only 8.2% usually ate 5 or more serves of vegetables per day (meeting the guidelines).
The League Table—What's most Important to Food Selection?

The summary graph of factors affecting food selection ranks each statement tested in this Medibank Health Check from the highest "true of me" rating to the lowest. It also categorises each statement according to the food selection factors tested in this survey and includes general demographic trends behind the results of each statement.

Based on these responses, the top five factors relating to food selection were: two statements relating to Price, and one each relating to Household Situation, Routine and Availability & Access. The five least important motivators of food selection related to Emotions (two), Knowledge (two) and Belief and Culture factors.

Overall, price has been identified as the leading factor behind food selection, but the mix of popular factors means there is no single or simple answer to better diet and health. The survey also reveals is there are a number of factors that need to be addressed to improve food selection and health. Several of the leading factors are, however, within the control of the individual and point to the way ahead.
# Factors Affecting Food Selection: Full Results

## Price

### #1. I always look at the price of food before I buy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True of me</th>
<th>Somewhat True of me</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Untrue of me</th>
<th>Untrue of me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Gender differences for combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”
- Age and Income Differences for Combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”

### #5. I will buy fruit and vegetables when they are cheaper and in season

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True of me</th>
<th>Somewhat True of me</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Untrue of me</th>
<th>Untrue of me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Gender differences for combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”
- Age and Income Differences for Combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”

### #12. I look for cheaper options and am budget conscious

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True of me</th>
<th>Somewhat True of me</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Untrue of me</th>
<th>Untrue of me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Gender differences for combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”
- Age and Income Differences for Combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”

### #33. Price is not an object – I buy the food I want

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True of me</th>
<th>Somewhat True of me</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Untrue of me</th>
<th>Untrue of me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Gender differences for combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”
- Age and Income Differences for Combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”

## Household Situation

### #2. I usually eat with other family members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True of me</th>
<th>Somewhat True of me</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Untrue of me</th>
<th>Untrue of me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Gender differences for combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”
- Age and Income Differences for Combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”

### #8. I cook for a family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True of me</th>
<th>Somewhat True of me</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Untrue of me</th>
<th>Untrue of me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Gender differences for combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”
- Age and Income Differences for Combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”

### #10. I eat what is served up to me

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True of me</th>
<th>Somewhat True of me</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Untrue of me</th>
<th>Untrue of me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Gender differences for combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”
- Age and Income Differences for Combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”

### #20. I cook just for myself

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True of me</th>
<th>Somewhat True of me</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Untrue of me</th>
<th>Untrue of me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Gender differences for combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”
- Age and Income Differences for Combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”

### # Overall ranking of statement “True of me”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True of me</th>
<th>Somewhat True of me</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Untrue of me</th>
<th>Untrue of me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Gender differences for combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”
- Age and Income Differences for Combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”
## Factors Affecting Food Selection: Full Results

### Routine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Gender Differences</th>
<th>Age and Income Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#3. I make sure I have regular meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases with age</td>
<td>Increases for Females</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$38%</td>
<td>$30%</td>
<td>$17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7. I have a sit-down family meal most nights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases with Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$31%</td>
<td>$25%</td>
<td>$22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10%</td>
<td>$12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11. I eat in front of TV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$26%</td>
<td>$34%</td>
<td>$18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$11%</td>
<td>$11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#15. I will snack between meals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreases with age</td>
<td>Increases for Females</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$19%</td>
<td>$42%</td>
<td>$22%</td>
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<tr>
<td>$12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>#17. I will have takeaway food at least once a week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decreases with age</td>
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<tr>
<td>$18%</td>
<td>$23%</td>
<td>$19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>$19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>#24. I will eat out at a restaurant at least once a week</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Decreases with age, Increases with Income</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>$12%</td>
<td>$17%</td>
<td>$18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>$22%</td>
<td>$31%</td>
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</table>

### Availability & Access

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#4. I have a wide variety of food choices and outlets close to me</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>$32%</td>
<td>$39%</td>
<td>$18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>$7%</td>
<td>$4%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>#23. I am prepared to travel to buy the food I need</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
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<tr>
<td>$13%</td>
<td>$34%</td>
<td>$34%</td>
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<tr>
<td>$13%</td>
<td>$6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#36. The availability of nearby food affects my ability to eat healthily</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>$8%</td>
<td>$22%</td>
<td>$28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25%</td>
<td>$17%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### # Overall ranking of statement “True of me”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True of me</th>
<th>Somewhat True of me</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Untrue of me</th>
<th>Untrue of me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Notes

- **Age and Income Differences for Combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”**
- **Gender differences for combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”**
Belief & Culture

#6. I believe a healthy lifestyle is about making the right food choice

- Neutral: 31%
- True of me: 45%
- Somewhat True of me: 19%
- Untrue of me: 4%
- Overall ranking: 1%

#16. My upbringing has had a strong influence on my approach to food

- Decreases with age: 18%
- Increases for Females: 38%
- Neutral: 26%
- True of me: 11%
- Somewhat Untrue of me: 7%

#27. My food is very much like what my parents used to cook

- Decreases with age: 11%
- Neutral: 31%
- True of me: 26%
- Somewhat Untrue of me: 20%
- Untrue of me: 12%

#28. My eating habits are not as healthy as they were when I was young

- Decreases with age: 10%
- Neutral: 20%
- True of me: 25%
- Somewhat Untrue of me: 26%
- Untrue of me: 19%

#39. My food is strongly influenced by my cultural background

- Decreases with age: 6%
- Neutral: 16%
- True of me: 26%
- Somewhat Untrue of me: 19%
- Untrue of me: 33%

# Overall ranking of statement “True of me”

Age and Income Differences for Combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”

Gender differences for combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”
Factors Affecting Food Selection: Full Results

Emotions

#9. I get a lot of pleasure out of eating food
- Increases with age and income
- Neutral
- Neutral
- Decreases with age
- Untrue of me

#9. I get a lot of pleasure out of eating food
- True of me: 29%
- Somewhat True of me: 37%
- Neutral: 25%
- Somewhat Untrue of me: 6%
- Untrue of me: 3%

#19. I eat more when I am bored
- Decreases with age
- Neutral
- Neutral
- Increases with Income
- Untrue of me

#19. I eat more when I am bored
- True of me: 16%
- Somewhat True of me: 35%
- Neutral: 24%
- Somewhat Untrue of me: 15%
- Untrue of me: 10%

#21. I eat more when I am stressed
- Decreases with age
- Neutral
- Neutral
- Increases with Income
- Untrue of me

#21. I eat more when I am stressed
- True of me: 14%
- Somewhat True of me: 22%
- Neutral: 28%
- Somewhat Untrue of me: 19%
- Untrue of me: 17%

#22. I eat more when I am out with friends and family
- Increases with age
- Neutral
- Neutral
- Decreases with Income
- Untrue of me

#22. I eat more when I am out with friends and family
- True of me: 13%
- Somewhat True of me: 33%
- Neutral: 29%
- Somewhat Untrue of me: 17%
- Untrue of me: 8%

#31. I always worry about the food I eat
- Decreases with age
- Neutral
- Neutral
- Increases with Income
- Untrue of me

#31. I always worry about the food I eat
- True of me: 9%
- Somewhat True of me: 22%
- Neutral: 31%
- Somewhat Untrue of me: 24%
- Untrue of me: 14%

#32. If I am sad eating food makes me feel better
- Decreases with age
- Neutral
- Neutral
- Neutral
- Untrue of me

#32. If I am sad eating food makes me feel better
- True of me: 9%
- Somewhat True of me: 21%
- Neutral: 32%
- Somewhat Untrue of me: 20%
- Untrue of me: 18%

#35. I am always thinking about food
- Decreases with age
- Neutral
- Neutral
- Increases with Income
- Untrue of me

#35. I am always thinking about food
- True of me: 8%
- Somewhat True of me: 21%
- Neutral: 29%
- Somewhat Untrue of me: 25%
- Untrue of me: 17%

#37. I feel overwhelmed with food choices
- Decreases with age
- Neutral
- Neutral
- Neutral
- Untrue of me

#37. I feel overwhelmed with food choices
- True of me: 7%
- Somewhat True of me: 19%
- Neutral: 29%
- Somewhat Untrue of me: 27%
- Untrue of me: 18%

#40. My diet is due to factors beyond my control
- Decreases with age
- Neutral
- Neutral
- Neutral
- Untrue of me

#40. My diet is due to factors beyond my control
- True of me: 5%
- Somewhat True of me: 14%
- Neutral: 29%
- Somewhat Untrue of me: 25%
- Untrue of me: 27%
Factors Affecting Food Selection: Full Results

Preparation Situation

#13. My meals will depend on what I have in the kitchen
- Increases with age
- Increases for Females
- True of me: 22%
- Somewhat true of me: 47%
- Neutral: 21%
- Somewhat untrue of me: 8%
- Untrue of me: 2%

#14. I plan my meals ahead so that I have the food I need
- Neutral
- Increases for Females
- True of me: 22%
- Somewhat true of me: 37%
- Neutral: 25%
- Somewhat untrue of me: 12%
- Untrue of me: 4%

#18. I will eat a pre-prepared meal at least once a week
- Decreases with age and income
- Increases for Males
- True of me: 17%
- Somewhat true of me: 26%
- Neutral: 19%
- Somewhat untrue of me: 19%
- Untrue of me: 19%

#26. Time is not an issue when it comes to preparing a meal
- Increases with age
- Neutral
- True of me: 12%
- Somewhat true of me: 25%
- Neutral: 30%
- Somewhat untrue of me: 23%
- Untrue of me: 10%

#29. I will go and buy the food I need for the meal that day
- Increases with income
- Neutral
- True of me: 10%
- Somewhat true of me: 26%
- Neutral: 27%
- Somewhat untrue of me: 21%
- Untrue of me: 16%

#30. I will avoid meals that take more than 30 minutes to prepare
- Neutral
- Neutral
- True of me: 10%
- Somewhat true of me: 23%
- Neutral: 25%
- Somewhat untrue of me: 28%
- Untrue of me: 14%
Factors Affecting Food Selection: Full Results

Knowledge

**#25.** I know I should change my diet and I know what needs to change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**#34.** I find information about what is healthy food confusing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**#38.** I find it difficult to make healthy food choices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decreases with age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**#41.** I should change but I am not sure what to do

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decreases with age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Overall ranking of statement ‘True of me’

Age and Income Differences for Combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”

- True of me
- Somewhat true of me
- Neutral
- Somewhat Untrue of me
- Untrue of me

Gender differences for combined “True of me” & “Somewhat true of me”
What Does This all Mean?

The results of the fifth Medibank Health Check show there are a complex range of factors affecting the food we select. This in turn challenges our ability to choose nutritious food and pursue a healthy balanced diet.

Stephan Mann (Framing Obesity in Economic Theory & Policy 2006:16) notes that:

“It is obvious that it was changes in our environment which caused the worldwide increase in obesity. It is less obvious, however, how individuals decide to become obese or simply do become obese. Reality is too complex to offer an integrated explanation.”

The survey highlights important demographic differences, with food selection being better in older age and with females who generally exhibit stronger decisiveness around statements on what affects their food choice.

The family home remains an important influencer of food selection and the TV continues to rule as the place to consume meals.

Interestingly, cultural background is one of the lesser influences on the food selection and consumption.

Overall, however, the complex nature of food selection is reflected in the low degree of control people believe they have over it. A critical interpretation from the research is that only half of respondents believed their diet was due to factors within their control.

This degree of control is compounded with a high level of uncertainty about whether people have a balanced diet: 58 per cent of respondents are either uncertain or believe their diet is not balanced.

The relatively close correlation between respondents’ understanding of a balanced diet and the Commonwealth Government’s prescribed diet suggests people know what a good diet is when they see it.

The challenge now is to convert this knowledge into better health outcomes for the population. This Medibank Health Check suggests that the way forward is for people to first identify what is in their control when it comes to the food they select and go from there.
Acknowledgements

Medibank would like to acknowledge the following for their involvement in the development of this report:

Dietitians Association of Australia.

Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation.

Associate Professor Tim Crowe, accredited practicing dietitian.
Questionnaire—
Medibank Health Check #5:
We would like to ask a few questions about your eating habits ...

1. What factors most influence the food you consume?
(Please rank in order of influence from most to least, where ‘1’ means it is has the MOST influence on the food you eat and ‘8’ means it has the LEAST influence)
- Price
- Time to prepare
- How close the shop is
- Nutritional value
- Cultural or religious factors
- Allergy / health factors
- What is available at the shops
- How I am feeling

2. When it comes to the price of food, which best reflects your views?
(scale: true of me, somewhat true of me, neutral, somewhat untrue of me, untrue of me)
- Price is not an object – I buy the food I want
- I will select what is nutritious before I consider price
- I am prepared to pay extra for food that is close rather than travel for cheaper food
- I will buy fruit and vegetables when they are cheaper and in season
- I always look at the price of food before I buy
- Price is less of a consideration when it comes to food for children
- I am prepared to pay more for organic or responsibly produced food
- I look for cheaper options and am budget conscious

3. When it comes to preparation of food which best describes
(scale: true of me, somewhat true of me, neutral, somewhat untrue of me, untrue of me)
- Time is not an issue when it comes to preparing a meal
- I will avoid meals that take more than 30 minutes to prepare
- I plan my meals ahead so that I have the food I need
- My meals will depend on what I have in the kitchen
- I will go and buy the food I need for the meal that day
- I will eat a pre-prepared meal at least once a week
4. When it comes to food and your family or living arrangements, what best describes you
   (scale: true of me, somewhat true of me, neutral, somewhat untrue of me, untrue of me)
   - I cook just for myself
   - I cook for a family
   - I usually eat with other family members
   - I eat what is served up to me
   - I make sure I have regular meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner)
   - I will snack between meals
   - I will eat out at a restaurant at least once a week
   - I will have takeaway food at least once a week
   - I have a sit-down family meal most nights
   - I eat in front of TV

5. When it comes to the availability of food what best describes your situation?
   (scale: true of me, somewhat true of me, neutral, somewhat untrue of me, untrue of me)
   - I have a wide variety of food choices and outlets close to me
   - The availability of nearby food affects my ability to eat healthily
   - I am prepared to travel to buy the food I need
   - My food is strongly influenced by my cultural background
   - My eating habits are not as healthy as they were when I was young
   - My upbringing has had a strong influence on my approach to food

6. What best describes how food makes you feel?
   (scale: true of me, somewhat true of me, neutral, somewhat untrue of me, untrue of me)
   - I get a lot of pleasure out of eating food
   - I eat more when I am out with friends and family
   - I eat more when I am bored
   - I eat more when I am stressed
   - If I am sad eating food makes me feel better
   - I feel overwhelmed with food choices
   - I always worry about the food I eat
7. Please select the option that you think is the healthiest diet. 
(e.g. if you think that eating vegetables 100% of the time is the healthiest then select the option that has 100% under Vegetables)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vegetables</th>
<th>Dairy</th>
<th>Protein</th>
<th>Grains</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. How would you describe your diet?
(scale: true of me, somewhat true of me, neutral, somewhat untrue of me, untrue of me)

- Well balanced – I don’t need to change anything
- I know I should change my diet and I know what needs to change
- I should change but I am not sure what to do
- My diet is due to factors beyond my control
- I find it difficult to make healthy food choices
- I am always thinking about food
- I find information about what is healthy food confusing
- I believe a healthy lifestyle is about making the right food choice
“Food Selection—you are what you eat!”