

Trends in Energy Intake in U.S. Between 1977 and 1996: Similar Shifts Seen Across Age Groups

Nielsen, S.J., Siega-Riz, A.M., & Popkin, B.M. (2002). Trends in energy intake in U.S. between 1977 and 1996: Similar shifts seen across age groups. *Obesity Research*, 10 (5):370-378.



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Total energy (food and beverage) intake has increased over the past 20 years, with shifts away from meals to snacks and from at-home to away-from-home consumption. This article describes findings from surveys of food intake to determine the trends in Americans' dining habits, stratified by age group. The analysis considers both dining locations and food sources as well as both total energy and breakdown into meal and snack subcomponents. Nationally representative data was taken from the Nationwide Food Consumption Survey (1977-1978) and the Continuing Survey of Food Intake by Individuals (1989-1991, 1994-1996, and 1998). The sample consisted of 63,380 individuals ages 2 and older. For each survey year, the percentage of total energy intake from meals and snacks was calculated separately for different age groups: ages 2-18, ages 19-39, ages 40-59, and 60 years and older. The percentage of energy intake by location (at-home consumption or preparation, vending, store eaten out, restaurant/fast-food, and school) and by specific food group was computed for all age groups, separately.

The trends in dining location and food sources were almost identical for all age groups. Key dietary behavior shifts over the course of the surveys include greater away-from-home consumption; large increases in total energy from salty snacks, soft drinks, and pizza; and large decreases in energy from low- and medium-fat milk and medium- and high-fat beef and pork. The similarity of changes across all age groups supports the assertion that broad-based environmental changes are needed to improve the diets of Americans.

Link: <http://www.obesityresearch.org/cgi/content/abstract/10/5/370>